

YOU'RE FIRED!

LEVITICUS 10:1-20

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He Expects Us To Obey All That He Commands.

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You're Fired!

Leviticus 10:1-20

I'm not quite sure as to how all of you are responding to our study through the book of Leviticus. But as for me, on the one hand I'm fascinated by the intricacy of the worship services, but on the other hand, I'm drawn to the emphasis on the holiness of God. That not only catches my attention, it also frightens me in a way. I know that in my own personal life and in the ministry, I am sure now that I have overemphasized the grace and mercy of God while at the same time downplaying His holiness and His unequivocal demands that we be holy. As I look back on my 30 years in the ministry, I know that I have not spent nearly enough time preaching and teaching holiness, and I am certain that I have not spent enough time pursuing holiness in my personal life.

It's passages like the one we are studying this morning that should shake us up and wake us up in regards to our relationship with God. Listen, the world and our culture want to emphasize things like love, acceptance, tolerance, and basically want to reduce Christianity to a type of feel-good, get along, be a good citizen type of practice. But if we believe the Bible is true and was indeed inspired by God, then this morning's text should shock us.

Last time we were together, God set apart the first priests. We could say that in last week's text, God hired the first five priests in this new type of worship.

This morning we will see Him fire two of them. He will fire them figuratively and literally. As a pastor, I am keenly aware of God's righteousness and His righteous demands of His people. None of us like to be fired. But some of us handle it better than others.

For example, you all remember that church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) It was so tough; they didn't much care for how they got rid of their pastors. The pastor who served that church before I got there had suffered extremely strained relations with the board and the congregation. Finally, he was able to find another job. He was appointed as a chaplain at the state prison. I was invited to attend his farewell discourse. Elated to get rid of him, the church was packed to hear his sermon. The pastor chose John 14:3 as his text and his title was, "I go and prepare a place for you ... that where I am, there you may be also."

Right then and there I realized that being a pastor was not in any way going to be a cakewalk. But in this morning's text, it's not the congregation that is upset with these two priests; it is God who fires them.

Again I don't say this with a great deal of pride because I have watched plenty of other garbage on television, but I have never seen an episode of "The Apprentice," but I have seen advertisements for it. The flamboyant Donald Trump looks at one of the contestants each week and says with a great deal of style and flair, "You're fired."

In this morning's text, God says with as great deal of style and flair, "You're fired!" Let's take the main idea of this text as a warning. **GOD IS HOLY AND DANGEROUS. HE EXPECTS US TO OBEY ALL THAT HE COMMANDS.** Sometimes I think we are lackadaisical when it comes to our spiritual walk with God. We feel free to bend, reinterpret, or even ignore the clear commands of Scripture. Believe me. That can cause some serious damage because as verses 1-7 indicate, God has a zero tolerance for disobedience. In other words, **GOD WILL NOT TOLERATE PEOPLE MAKING UP THEIR OWN RELIGION.**

I. Zero Tolerance (Vs 1-7)

God Will Not Tolerate People Making Up Their Own Religion.

A. Fired (1-3)

In verses 1-3, the first two priests in Jewish history are fired. When you're fired by Donald Trump, you can always go on to bigger and better things. But when God fires you, you're finished.

Let me just set the stage for us. The Hebrews built the worship area and the Worship Tent according to the specifications God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. Further, they set up the tent and dressed Aaron up in the High Priest clothing and dressed his sons in the priestly garments. For one week, Moses anointed the worship area, the worship utensils, the Worship Tent, and the altars. For one week Moses ordained, dedicated, and anointed Aaron and his sons. At the end of the week, God miraculously sent fire out from the Worship Tent and consumed up all the meat and bread on the altar. The people were overwhelmed with the whole experience.

This morning's incident takes place on the first day of the new priests' ministry. It is their first day on the job. This is also important to keep in mind. There are only five priests who will have to supervise all the worship for over 2 ½ million people. They would be very busy supervising, teaching, and leading worship. It's important to mention how many priests there were for this reason. God doesn't care if we are short-staffed or not. God fired 2 out of the 5 priests on the very first day.

The two priests we meet here in verse one are Nadab and Abihu. These are Aaron's two oldest sons. It says that they took their censers, put fire in them, and added incense. When they offered up the incense to the LORD, the text says that they offered up unauthorized fire. There has been a great deal of speculation as to what they did. Some of the suggestions are as follows. They may have used their own personal censer pots rather than those set apart and anointed. They may have taken coals from a different source other than the altar as they had been directed. In the book of Exodus, the exact formula to make the worship incense was given. Some people feel they may have gotten a little creative and added some of their own mixture to the incense. Others suggest they may have wandered too far into the worship tent. Some say they were being proud and trying to usurp their father's authority. Later on we will see why some say they were drunk. We will never know what made their offering unacceptable and what made it strange fire instead of a sweet aroma to God. What we do know is this. They either ignored God's commands or outright disobeyed them. They knew what God commanded and they failed to comply.

Let's take a moment to think about how many Sundays we come here to worship, knowing that our relationship with God is not right because we are ignoring His commands, disobeying His commands, our just plain making up our own religion. Let's think about how we often come here to worship on Sunday, while accepting the standards of our culture, our friends, and our families, and placing them above God's standards. I think that many of us are good citizens in our community, but not even close to being Christian. And yet, we come here on Sunday to worship God. I'm pretty sure that this would be offering up strange or unauthorized fire.

Look at how God responds to this. Fire came out of God's presence and killed them on the spot. Let's think for a moment on the theme of fire. Last week, the Israelites worshiped. God was pleased. Fire came out of the Worship Tent and devoured the sacrifice burning on the altar. It was a happy occasion. We just saw two priests offer up strange fire. God rejected it. Fire came out and killed the priests. They offered up a sacrifice to God and God said, "You're fired!"

Let me ask you what this does to your theology about a gracious, merciful, and forgiving God? How does that square with our theology? We do not take God nearly seriously enough. God put an end to that nonsense quickly. He didn't really care that left Him with only 3 priests to serve 2 ½ million people.

The summary is short and sweet. Through Moses God told Aaron basically that when people approach Him in worship, He will manifest His holiness. If people are in a right relationship with

God, His fire will refine them, excite them, and make them glow with happiness. If people approach God hypocritically, then God's fire will burn them, fry them, and wipe them out. God's glory killed the firstborn in every Egyptian household. God's glory allowed the Hebrews to cross the Red Sea on dry land. God's glory drowned the entire Egyptian army. Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and 70 elders witnessed God's gracious glory on Mt. Sinai when God revealed Himself to them and allowed them to eat and drink in His presence.

Approaching God can be exciting, but it is also dangerous. Please never forget that. When Aaron heard these words come out of Moses' mouth, he remained silent. He clearly understood.

We would do well to think about identifying ourselves as Christians. And beyond that, we need to be careful about identifying ourselves as Christian leaders. It seems as if God is often more gracious with unbelievers than He is with His children. He expects a great deal from us. He expects much more from His leaders. I'm pretty sure you feel as if I do. I do not want to hear, "You're fired!" from God.

B. Clean Up (4-5)

What a day. The very first day on the job, two priests are lying dead in the worship area. Someone has to clean up this mess as described in verses 4-5. There are two dead bodies in the worship area. We will learn that if someone touches a dead body, they become ceremonially unclean for a period of time. If Aaron or his other two sons were to touch these bodies, they would become unable to perform their worship duties. So Moses quickly summoned two of Aaron's cousins Mishael and Elzaphan to come and carry out the bodies.

If you look at verse 5, you will see the phrase, "still in their tunics." In other words, their priestly garments became their burial clothes. In his book *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis cleverly points out how religious people learn to wear their hurts and excuses as clothes that keep them in hell. We must constantly evaluate and reevaluate our thoughts, words, and behaviors. We must have people around us who will continually push us towards more righteous living. I do not want to die in the clothes of immorality, worldliness, sin, and deception. I don't want to have anyone clean up messes that I have made due to making up my own rules for living. Let me just take this moment to warn us that just because people use the Bible and get together doesn't mean they are honoring God. Let's be careful as to how we are dressed. Be dressed in righteousness.

C. No Union Appeal (6-7)

If you think God's killing these two priests on the spot was harsh, hold on to your hat because in verses 6-7, there is no room for a union appeal. God killed them and then again through Moses, He forbade Aaron and his other two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar to even mourn or grieve for the loss of their son/brothers. The Hebrews grieved by tearing their clothes letting their hair down and unkempt, sitting in the dirt and crying, wailing, and mourning. Further, the bodies were carried outside the camp. Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar are forbidden to go outside the camp and even witness the burial. God forbade them to grieve.

What does that do to our theology? God demands that Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar demonstrate their solidarity with God's decision. They must demonstrate their loyalty and dedication to God's holiness. I know that I have preached a defective Gospel all these years. Yes, Jesus is loving, merciful, gracious, and forgiving. But He is also dangerous and He will not tolerate our made up religion for long. Please, I'm begging all of us to keep a balanced view of God. He is holy and He demands holiness of us. Aaron and his two remaining sons must not grieve or attend the funeral under the threat of death.

If we had a right view of God, fear should motivate us to do right as well as love. Aaron and his sons obeyed. They stayed at the worship tent. I hope and pray that all of you will get into small accountability groups and that you will be honest enough to be held accountable and hold others accountable. The fact is this. GOD WILL NOT TOLERATE PEOPLE MAKING UP THEIR OWN

RELIGION. If you are in a group where you all pat one another on the back, get out of that group. It is dangerous to your health.

II. Moving On (Vs 8-15)

God Will Accomplish His Work With Or Without Us.

We may think we are important and God will tolerate our lackadaisical and complacent attitudes. But the fact is that life goes on after God's judgment and we see Israel's worship moving on in verses 8-15. If we ever think we are valuable or irreplaceable, we need to hear this theme in this section. GOD WILL ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK WITH OR WITHOUT US.

A. Workplace Safety (8-11)

Workplace safety is important to preserve life and prevent future deaths as illustrated in verses 8-11. Have you ever gone into workplaces where they have these signs posted that say something like, "This workplace has gone," and then they leave a blank space followed by, "days without an accident."? I have seen several of these signs over the years and have never seen one filled out. In other words, the signs always read, "This workplace has gone ____ days without an accident." I am so tempted to say to the employees, "This must really be a dangerous place to work since according to the sign, you guys have accidents every day."

But God is serious about workplace safety for the priests. God has warned the entire nation that having Him live in the center of their camp and being part of their community would be dangerous for them since He is so holy and perfect. That doubly applies to the priests since they work in very close proximity to God at the Worship Tent. We also said that the absolutely most holy place in the whole camp was the Holy of Holies which was located in the inner most part of the Worship Tent, officially known as the Tabernacle. Inside the Holy of Holies sat the most holy object in Israel's worship, the Ark of the Covenant. On top of the Angels' outstretched arms was space known as the Mercy Seat, where God met Israel and forgave all of the nation's sins. The Ark was so holy that when a well-meaning man reached out and stopped it from falling off a wagon, God struck him dead on the spot.

The priests, the Israelites, and we need to understand how holy God is, and consequently how dangerous it is to be around Him.

The prohibition God gave Aaron in verse 9 is why some scholars have conjectured that the sin of Aaron's two sons that God struck dead was being drunk and careless in the worship area. That could very well be. God said the priests could not drink alcohol before going on duty or while on duty. God said if they showed up with alcohol on their breath, He would kill them on the spot. God didn't say if they came drunk He would kill them, He said He would kill them if they even had one drink before coming to work. Starting in the very next chapter, God is going to spell out rules and regulations that were to govern the social, civil, and religious affairs of His chosen people, the Hebrews. The priests were required to make judgments and valuations. They were to help the people decide what was clean and what could make them ceremonially unclean. If people were unclean, the priests would have to instruct them as to how they could once again become clean. Being able to think clearly is what Israel depended on for their very survival while in the presence of God.

The command to Christians is that we should not be drunk. In other words, we need to have clear minds. We are called on to make decisions every day as to what will please God and what will not. That is why drugs, alcohol, and other things that dull our minds are dangerous to us. Jesus said our primary task in life is to seek first the Kingdom of God and all His righteousness. That will be hard to do if our minds are dulled by drugs or alcohol or any other addictions. God has commanded the priests not to drink before or during their tour of duty. God commands us Christians not to be under the influence of drugs, alcohol, addictions, or worldliness. Instead we are to be under the control of the Holy Spirit.

B. Picking Up the Slack (12-13)

In verses 12-13, Aaron's other two sons must now pick up the slack of their dead brothers. The worship doesn't stop. The work must go on. But because of two priests' stupidity, the remaining priests now have double work to do. Remember, part of the service was the priests eating a portion of the bread. It now didn't matter how Eleazar and Ithamar felt. They needed to continue on with God's work. They may be sad, frightened, and tired. Yet, they are required to finish the worship service. When we disqualify ourselves for service because of bad behavior, or if we withdraw from service, or if we don't do the best job we can, we leave others to pick up the slack.

There are two lessons for us here. I don't think we have any of the first type of people here at church. The first type think they are so important that if they were to step down or leave the church, the ministry would fold. There are many pastors who believe this. That is just plain wrong. God will accomplish all He has to accomplish with or without us. We are the ones who will miss out on the blessings God has for us.

The other type of people is those who are content to sit back and let others do everything. The common statistic is that in most churches, 20% of the people end up doing 80% of the work. I'm not sure when this change of focus took place in the United States, but I'm sure it happened during the last 50 years. As part of their personal pursuit of holiness, Christians were dedicated to other believers in their church, they were committed to the building, and they were loyal to the church institution. Somewhere along the line, Christians in the United States are no longer interested in the church as an institution. Christians now have become consumers. They go to churches they feel minister to them. They are looking for programs, preaching, personalities, and all sorts of other things.

The people who attend churches now view the pastor and leaders as employees who are there to meet their needs. When their needs are no longer being met, they simply find another church. Everything in our culture is about the individual. God will accomplish all He has to accomplish before He comes again. The question every Christian must ask herself or himself is this, "Am I a liability to the church I attend or am I an asset?" In other words, "Am I a drain on the assets of the church or am I a contributor?"

C. Using the Benefits (14-15)

One of the common characteristics of companies that employees love working for is that the company encourages them to use all their benefits. In verses 14-15 God encourages the remaining priests to use their benefits. You remember from our study through the sacrifices that the thigh and the breast belonged to the priests and their families. God encourages the priests to take their food at the end of the day, to go home, and eat with their families. It is clear that God wants the priests to know that life goes on. I'm pretty sure when they got home and started eating, and their wives asked them how their day at work was, that was one interesting conversation. They would have to explain how God killed their two brothers. I'm also quite certain that their wives and children were more than a little worried about their husbands and fathers going back to work the next day. Who would have thought that being a priest was much more dangerous than being a soldier?

We would do well to remember that life will go on with or without us. When we go home and look at our families, we should remember that God could take our lives at any moment. I don't know about you, but I don't want to die as a result of pushing God over the edge to the point He can't stand me any more and kills me. If you are a Christian parent and you say you love your children, then the best thing you can do is live a holy life. Your children probably want to see you come home at night. From this section, we would do well never to think we are pretty good. We should never presume on God's grace. He does demand that we be holy. He does expect us to grow into the men and women He has commanded us to be and He expects us to complete all the good works He has prepared in advance for us to do. The point in life is this. GOD WILL

ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK WITH OR WITHOUT US. I know that I personally want to be and do all God has for me to be and do.

III. Another Possible Infraction (Vs 16-20)

God Continues To Show His Hand Of Blessing Even In The Midst Of Tragedy.

Another possible infraction surfaces in verses 16-20. What is incredible is this. GOD CONTINUES TO SHOW HIS HAND OF BLESSING EVEN IN THE MIDST OF TRAGEDY.

In the first section, Moses confronted Aaron and Aaron had no response. He remained silent. In this section, Moses confronts Aaron, but this time Aaron responds and Moses is satisfied with the answer.

A. Another Situation (16-18)

Another situation is described in verses 16-18. In all the confusion, Moses realizes that the sin offering had been completely burned up. A portion of this was also supposed to be eaten. Moses assumed that Aaron and his sons had just let it slip by. And so he confronts Aaron.

B. A Good Explanation (19-20)

But in verses 19-20 Aaron gives a good explanation. I think what Aaron was saying was this. When the priests offered up their sin offering, they allowed the entire sacrifice to be burned up since it would be wrong for them to benefit from their sin. We described this in depth when we studied through the sin offering. I think Aaron was saying was that because of the grievous sin his sons committed, the sin offering should be completely burned up. His two sons brought sin and guilt into the worship area. Aaron felt it better that the sacrifice be completely burned up as a sign of repentance, atonement, and cleansing. Moses was satisfied. God spared Aaron and his two younger sons.

I think that one of the things I have noticed over the years is that even when we go through the most difficult times in life, God continues to make us, mold us, and teach us through the whole thing. And when we come out on the other side of our suffering, if we have been faithful to God, we come out better and stronger. GOD CONTINUES TO SHOW HIS HAND OF BLESSING EVEN IN THE MIDST OF TRAGEDY.

IV. EPILOGUE

I said at the beginning of this sermon that I have preached a defective Gospel. Let me correct some of that right now. God is as dangerous as He is gracious. We must never forget that God does not play with sin and He does not tolerate people making up their own rules. GOD IS HOLY AND DANGEROUS. HE EXPECTS US TO OBEY ALL THAT HE COMMANDS.

In the book of Numbers, an incident arises between Moses and some of his relatives. They are kind of jealous that God singled out Aaron and his sons to be priests. These relatives were known as the sons of Korah. Korah challenges Moses and Aaron. Listen to how God handles this. Oh, and the community felt that God treated Korah unfairly and watch how God responds to them.

Numbers 16 /NLT

"19 Meanwhile, Korah had stirred up the entire community against Moses and Aaron, and they all assembled at the Tabernacle entrance. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to the whole community, 20 and the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 21 "Get away from these people so that I may instantly destroy them!"...

23 And the LORD said to Moses, 24 "Then tell all the people to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."

25 So Moses got up and rushed over to the tents of Dathan and Abiram, followed closely by the Israelite leaders. 26 "Quick!" he told the people. "Get away from the tents of these wicked men, and don't touch anything that belongs to them. If you do, you will be destroyed for their sins." 27 So all the people stood back from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Then Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the entrances of their tents with their wives and children and little ones. ...

31 He had hardly finished speaking the words when the ground suddenly split open beneath them. 32 The earth opened up and swallowed the men, along with their households and the followers who were standing with them, and everything they owned. 33 So they went down alive into the grave, along with their belongings. The earth closed over them, and they all vanished. 34 All of the people of Israel fled as they heard their screams, fearing that the earth would swallow them, too. 35 Then fire blazed forth from the LORD and burned up the 250 men who were offering incense. ...

41 But the very next morning the whole community began muttering again against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You two have killed the LORD'S people!" 42 As the people gathered to protest to Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the Tabernacle and saw that the cloud had covered it, and the glorious presence of the LORD appeared.

43 Moses and Aaron came and stood at the entrance of the Tabernacle, 44 and the LORD said to Moses, 45 "Get away from these people so that I can instantly destroy them!" But Moses and Aaron fell face down on the ground. ...

47 Aaron did as Moses told him and ran out among the people. The plague indeed had already begun, but Aaron burned the incense and made atonement for them. 48 He stood between the living and the dead until the plague was stopped. 49 But 14,700 people died in that plague, in addition to those who had died in the incident involving Korah. 50 Then because the plague had stopped, Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the Tabernacle.

Please, I'm begging us never to forget that the God we worship does not tolerate sin and He does not tolerate fools. Let us keep in mind that not only is God loving, forgiving, gracious, and merciful, He is also holy and dangerous. Let us quit making up our own religion and get back to worshipping the God of the Bible.