



Leviticus 10:1-11
Strange Fire and Profane Worship

NKJ Leviticus 10:1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.

2 So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

3 And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' " So 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 brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp."

5 So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said.

6 And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled.

7 "You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle 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 Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying:

9 "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations,

10 "that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean,

11 "and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."

I am preaching today on this subject because I realized this past week that it has been some time since I actually spoke about why we worship the way we do, and in particular why we do not follow what is sometimes called "the church calendar" and observe Holy Days like Christmas, Easter, or saints days. I think this is necessary because while at one time, neither American Presbyterians, nor Baptists, nor Congregationalists, nor any of the American Protestant denominations that confessed that worship should consist only of what is commanded in scripture practiced them, most Christians these days do and congregations like ours that follow the earlier practice have become something of an oddity. I should stress that I am preaching this, not to attack the practices of other churches in observing days like Easter, but in order to explain why *we* do not. I should also explain, that I'm not attempting to tell you what national holidays you should observe in your own home, merely why we do not observe days like Easter or for that matter July 4th in the worship of the church.

Although this passage concerns the worship of the Tabernacle in the Old Testament, it still teaches us some very basic rules regarding the holiness of God, the direction, manner, and spirit in which we are to worship Him, and the awesome responsibilities of His ministers in doing so.

Let's start by setting the context, Nadab and Abihu were two of the four sons of Aaron, they had just previously been consecrated and set aside to the priesthood with their father, Aaron who was the high priest. It was Aaron and his son alone who were to appear before the Lord, represent the people and offer the appointed sacrifices. One might imagine the pride of Aaron, as a father at seeing his sons elevated to serve the Lord, his expectations that in time the Lord would appoint them to succeed him as High Priest.

Now as Priests, part of their duty to the Lord was to offer a sacrifice of sweet smelling incense to Him on the altar of incense which stood before the mercy seat, the lid of the Ark of the Covenant inside the tabernacle of meeting. The Lord had told them how to make this incense and when and who was to offer it. But in this case, they went in to the tabernacle, taking incense that God had not commanded them to offer, at a time when He had not commanded them to offer it, kindled with fire He had not authorized. And instead of being accepted fire goes out from the Lord and consumes them.

Their intention had not been to pollute God's worship, and I'm sure they felt that He would be pleased with their initiative and their invention, I mean they weren't doing anything He had specifically prohibited in the Ten Commandments, they were just doing things He hadn't commanded. And it wasn't like they were average Joes from any old tribe. These were the sons of Aaron newly consecrated to the priesthood. Certainly if anyone had been able to introduce innovations into worship, it should have been them.

But brothers and sisters, I hope you see this rule, never in scripture does God say you have the right to create new forms of worship, to make images I haven't commanded, to invent special days to worship me on. Instead He had said in Deuteronomy 12:32 - "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

After the sin of their father Aaron in making an image of God and creating an uncommanded Holy day at Sinai, and the terrible consequences of that, you'd think they'd have gotten that but apparently they thought a little invention a little deviation couldn't possibly hurt. And in that they followed the general nature of mankind, because ever since the fall, man has been terribly prone to idolatry, Thomas Watson said "Our nature is prone to this sin as dry wood to take fire" Calvin rightly called the human nature an idolatrum factorum – an Idol Factory.

Our tendency is not only to worship false gods which is forbidden in the first commandment, but to falsely worship the true God, which was forbidden in the second commandment.

And God once again shows, lest this tendency to treat his commandments lightly and for invention and irreverence to become widespread shows that this is not ok, but slaying them and thus making them an example for all Israel.

What a terrible moment that must have been when Aaron gazed at the charred bodies of his beloved sons, a father's heart could not help but be in anguish at that moment.

Moses, does not offer Aaron vain platitudes, "I am so sorry" but instead he points out this was not some unjust or unexpected action of the Lord, the Lord has not acted arbitrarily. Rather he reminds Aaron that the He must be treated as Holy by those who came near, and in that His worship must be done, in reverence and awe, and according to His commands. Nadab and Abihu had not hallowed His name, instead they had treated Him and his worship presumptuously. He did this because if the priests treated God this way, what would the camp do?

The Lord is merciful to Aaron in that he does not require he or his remaining sons Eleazar, and Ithamar to remove the bodies, which also would have made them ceremonially unclean and incapable of ministering before Him, instead that duty falls upon their cousins.

He is not permitted to mourn –

In order that he might continue to serve

In order that he might reaffirm the JUSTICE and HOLINESS OF THE LORD

Is. 66:24 "And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

Later, after their bodies are carried away the Lord restates the importance of serving him properly and not getting drunk, and that their duty was simply to give people HIS commandments.

This was a principle that we have almost lost today

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, "Obedience is better than sacrifice." "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men," (1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew. 15:9.) – John Calvin

What we need is a reformation that restores the simplicity of worship and the sufficiency of the word

At the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, Reformers like Calvin and Luther recognized that the idolatry of the church had become a stench in the nostrils of God. The Church had taken upon herself a discretionary power to invent new methods of worshipping God, and every year there was another uncommanded holy day added to the church calendar, another biblically-baseless ritual inserted into the worship service, another relic "discovered" to be venerated by the faithful.

What those reformers realized that these innovations were a result of the natural outworking of human depravity. No one, not even the Pope, had the right to add anything to the worship of God. Jesus had not said "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that you dream up"

Jesus had said "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"

They realized that the church had not been given a power to make up anything new and bind men's consciences with it – the church is not a legislature that creates new laws and commands men to obey them, rather she is to use Paul's phrase an ambassador called upon to faithfully transmit the commands of King Jesus.

The Reformers therefore took seriously the admonition of Deuteronomy 12:32

"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."
So they endeavored despite the opposition of the Roman Catholic Church to clear away all the man-made garbage that was obscuring the Gospel worship of the church and get back to the commands of scripture.

That was what the Reformation of the Church was all about, getting back to the source so that all of their faith, life, and worship consisted of **THE BIBLE, THE WHOLE BIBLE, AND NOTHING BUT THE BIBLE**

When they removed even some of the dearest and oldest man made traditions of the church – for instance Holy Days, the church calendar – they were attacked for shaking the traditional foundation of the church. But they answered that no matter how old the practice was, if it wasn't commanded or prescribed in the Word of God it had no place in the worship of God. Will-worship is still will-worship, regardless of how ancient it is. And lest we forget Jesus was condemning practices that were sometimes hundreds of years old when he said of the Pharisees:

"And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:9)

And telling them that they were guilty of: "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down [implying antiquity]. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:13)

"I. The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.[1] But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.[2]" (WCF 21.1)

"THERE is no day commanded in scripture to be kept holy under the gospel but the Lord's day, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Festival days, vulgarly called Holy-days, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued." – Westminster Directory for Public Worship

There is no warrant in Scripture for the observance of Christmas and Easter as holy days, rather the contrary (see Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-21), and such observance is contrary to the principles of the

Reformed Faith, conducive to will worship, and not in harmony with the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. --General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern Presbyterians), Deliverance on Christmas and Easter (1899).

1) As teachers we must set the highest Standard:

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

2) “The names of Nadab and Abihu had become very great and honourable among them; none more talked of, nor more expected to appear abroad after the days of their consecration, to receive the honours and caresses of the crowd, whose manner it is to adore the rising sun; and next to Moses and Aaron, who were old and going off, Nadab and Abihu (who had been in the mount with God, Ex. 24:1) were looked upon as the great favourites of heaven, and the hopes of their people; and now on a sudden, when the tidings of the event had scarcely reached their ears, to see them both carried out dead, with the visible marks of divine vengeance upon them, as sacrifices to the justice of God, they could not choose but cry out, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? 1 Sa. 6:20. 3. They carried them out (and probably buried them) in their coats, and the garments of their priesthood, which they had lately put on, and perhaps were too proud of. Thus the impartiality of God's justice was proclaimed, and all the people were made to know that even the priests' garments would not protect an offender from the wrath of God. And it was easy to argue, "If they escape not when they transgress, can we expect to go unpunished?"”