

Elementary

The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting
(Leviticus 1:1 ESV)

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.
(Matthew 5:17-18 ESV)

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (Gal. 4:1-2 ESV)

What Does The Law Teach Us About Leadership?

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Leviticus 8-10

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 8.

As I've mentioned throughout this series, one of the reasons why the Law was such an effective teacher was because it was immersive. The Israelites didn't simply hear what the Law had to say about sin, and holiness, and forgiveness; they saw the lesson, and smelled it, and tasted it. Therefore, as we approach the text this morning, I want to do my best to immerse you into the scene. Imagine with me now.

You're in the desert with nearly one million of your people. To your left is Mount Zion – which just days ago was surrounded by a cloud of glory and was illuminated with flashes of lightning. In fact, when Moses came down from that mountain the first time, he sent the whole camp into a panic because his face was shining like the sun! God's glory so transformed Moses that he had to wear a veil for days whenever he came back down from his encounters!

And now, the glory that used to dwell on Mount Zion has descended into your midst. There is a large encampment set up with curtains surrounding it. This is the tabernacle. Levites equipped with sharp spears stand outside the curtains to make sure that no one enters unworthily. Inside the curtains there is a wide-open space. There you find an enormous bowl where the sacrifices are to be washed and behind it you see

the great altar where sacrifices are to be offered to the Lord each day. Behind them, you see a tent – the tent of meeting – the place where the ark of the covenant is stored and where the presence of God now tangibly resides. A cloud of glory rises up from the tent of meeting, and you tremble in fear and wonder as you look to the place where your holy, holy, holy God has condescended to meet with you.

Up until now, Moses has served as the mediator between the people and God. But Moses won't live forever, and you wonder if there will be a succession plan. Who will continue to teach us all that the Law requires? Who will protect us from stepping out of line and falling under the wrath of God? Who will offer the sacrifices and enter into God's presence on our behalf?

The Israelites needed to be led, and in Leviticus 8-10 we find God's gracious provision. This morning we are going to look to Leviticus 8-10 and we are going to ask the question: "What does the Law teach us about Leadership?"

What Does The Law Teach Us About Leadership?

In terms of the structure of the book of Leviticus, chapters 1-7 provide detailed instructions for all of the sacrifices that would be offered in the tabernacle. As we turn to chapters 8-10, the administrators of these sacrifices are introduced and appointed. In these three chapters, we read about the 7-day-long inauguration ceremony of the priesthood. Rather than reading the text in its entirety, we're going to walk through slowly and pull out some important lessons along the way.

Before we do that, I want to say a quick word about how the lessons of the priesthood apply today. In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is described as our great high priest. So, as we study the priesthood, we should see a glimpse and a foretaste of Jesus. Yes!

But the New Testament also applies the lessons from the priesthood to the spiritual leaders in the community. In the same way that the Levites were provided for by the Israelites that they ministered to, so too in the New Testament community do we find a call for churches to provide for their spiritual leaders. So, as we study the priesthood, we should see a glimpse of New Testament eldership. Yes!

But the Bible also describes the people of God as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. So, as we study the priesthood, we should see a glimpse of the calling of every follower of Christ. Yes!

There are three legitimate tiers of application that we can and should be considering as we study this text and the first lesson we learn here is that:

1. Leaders are appointed by God

Look with me at verses 1-3 of chapter 8:

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread. ³And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” (Leviticus 8:1-3 ESV)

Notice first that the priesthood is selected, appointed, and instituted under the direction of God. The congregation didn't draw straws. There was no election. There was no aptitude test. God pointed to Aaron and his sons and said, “Them! Set them apart for leadership in the temple.” In the same way, the Lord identified the Levites to serve in the tabernacle and to function as the priests for the nation. In the same way, the Lord later set apart Saul, and then David to serve as Kings over Israel.

Leadership in God's kingdom is given, not taken.

We find numerous examples of men and women trying to force their way into leadership roles and those stories all end in ruin. Miriam challenges Moses' right to speak for God and she breaks out in leprosy. Absalom manipulates his way to the throne, and he is run through with spears. Jezebel connives her way to the throne, and she is thrown out of a tower and eaten by dogs.

When God's people need leadership, God acts. God appoints. He knows what His people need, and He provides accordingly. The Israelites needed a prophet, and the Lord gave them Moses. They needed a priesthood, and the Lord gave them Aaron.

That was true in the Old Covenant, and it is true today. We read in Ephesians 4:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV)

Old Testament and New, leaders are a gift! They are from God, for you; to equip you for the work of ministry and to build you up so that you can stand.

On that note, I wrote this in my AGM report, but let me just say it here: We have received such incredible gifts from the Lord since our inception 8-and-a-half years ago. The board of elders at Cornerstone prayed for, equipped, and resourced us so that we could learn how to stand on our own two feet. Pastor Paul laboured so hard week after week. He preached at the main campus and then he drove down here each week to preach again. He brought our leaders under his wing and went over and above in discipling and mentoring us.

That was a gift. It was a gift from God. We were led well and fed well and I hope and pray – as the baton is passed to this leadership team – that we will be used by the Lord to continue to bless and equip you.

Old Testament and New, leaders are appointed by God. Second, the Law teaches us that:

2. Leaders must first be followers

The expression “as the LORD commanded” appears 16 times in these three chapters¹ – and that repetition is intentional. It’s not as if Moses simply ran out of words – no he is using repetition here to communicate a fundamental lesson: The high priest needed to obey God with absolute precision.

Moses learned this lesson the hard way. When he was in the wilderness and the people were thirsty, God ordered Moses to speak to the rock and so that it would provide water for the people. But Moses didn’t follow God’s instructions. In his frustration, Moses struck the rock.

Do you remember what his consequence was for disobeying God’s clear instruction? We find it in Numbers 20:12:

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” (Numbers 20:12 ESV)

¹ This was helpfully pointed out by Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus (NICOT)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 130.

Do you see that? Moses did not “uphold God as holy.” As a leader, Moses was supposed to demonstrate in word and deed a humble and reverent obedience to God’s commands. But Moses didn’t do that. In his anger he obscured the object lesson that God had designed for His people. He struck the rock. And, as a consequence, God declared that Moses would not be the one to lead the people into the promised land.

Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? (Luke 6:46 ESV)

This is one of the fundamental lessons that we learn in the Law: We only approach God on His terms. “As the LORD commanded” was to be the motto for the priesthood. A priest who understood his own sinfulness, and who understood God’s unfathomable glory, and who marvelled at the miracle of God with us would NEVER deviate from God’s instructions. When you understand and believe all of that, you trust in God’s provision, and you obey His instructions. As one commentator notes:

One’s approach to God is the surest dissection and deepest revelation of the heart.²

Leaders need to approach God with reverence. Leaders need to be students of the word and to structure their lives around what God says. Leaders need to lead the way in obedience.

If you want to lead faithfully in your home, then you need to pull that Bible down off of your shelf, and you need to get into it. Model obedience for your children. Let them see that as they follow you, you are following Christ. Let them see that it is safe to submit to your leadership because you yourself submit to the leadership of God.

Leaders must first be followers. Third, the Law teaches us that:

3. Leaders represent their people

Flip ahead with me to verse 6-7:

And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water. ⁷ And he put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied

² L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend The Mountain Of The Lord (A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus)*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 126.

the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band. (Leviticus 8:6-7
ESV)

As Baptists, we don't typically employ uniforms in ministry, so this language feels foreign to us. But uniforms can be very useful, and they communicate some important truths. For starters, when a person puts on a uniform, it indicates that they are representing an office rather than an individual. For example, when you see a judge in their black robe you trust that they are going to give a ruling – not on the basis of their personal preferences – but on the basis of the rule of law. Tommy Thompson isn't weighing in on your legal case – Mister Justice Thompson is. And he has sworn to leave Tommy's preferences behind and to put the law first. That's what the robe signifies.

We are meant to see that here. When the people looked up and saw the coat, and the sash, and the ephod, they were meant to see the high priest – not Aaron. They were meant to see the office – not the man.

Truth be told, I wonder if we wouldn't be well served to reclaim some of that in our modern-day churches. Isn't it true that we have an awful tendency to focus on the man, rather than the office? This is one of the reasons why we are intentional here with giving opportunities for other men to preach once a month from this pulpit. It is a helpful, monthly reminder for us that the Spirit of God uses the word of God to do the work of God. The messenger matters – to be sure – but the messenger is replaceable. What is irreplaceable and non-negotiable is the MESSAGE. The church that understands and believes that will grow and thrive through the ages because she knows that her vitality is not dependent upon the preacher in the pulpit but on the truth that he proclaims.

When Aaron died and his oldest son succeeded him, the congregation would have been hard pressed to spot a difference. The high priest dressed in his priestly robes was still there to meet them.

Before we move on, I want to draw your attention to one unique aspect of the high priest's uniform. He wore on his chest an ephod – which was essentially a breastplate. On that breastplate were 12 precious stones. These stones were not merely decorative – they symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel. The priest was a representative of his people. He went before the Lord FOR THEM. He made sacrifices FOR THEM. He woke up each morning and washed himself and put on his attire and stepped into his office SO AS TO REPRESENT THEM before the Lord.

When leaders lose sight of this truth they are no longer leading. Leaders exist because God loves His people! Every Monday night as your elders gather, we pray over the membership family by family – name by name. We discuss where we need to grow, and we pray and make plans to address those needs. Those weekly meetings are about one thing: God glorified in and through your life. If we ever lose sight of that, we will lose our leadership. God will see to it.

Leaders represent their people, and that is a frightening truth because the next thing that the Law teaches us about leadership is that:

4. Leaders are redeemed sinners

Leviticus 8 isn't the first time that we are told that Aaron and his sons will serve as priests. They were actually introduced as the future priests all the way back in Exodus 29. But shortly after that announcement, something terrible happened. Do you remember? In Exodus 32, while Moses was on top of Mount Sinai receiving the ten commandments, Aaron – the soon to be high priest – was melting down gold earrings and bracelets and fashioning a golden calf! The soon to be high priest was assisting the congregation in breaking the first and second commandment!

I would imagine there was probably some discussion in the camp as to whether or not Moses would be unveiling a plan for a NEW high priest to replace Aaron who had certainly disqualified himself.

And yet, by the grace of God, that's not what happened. In spite of his embarrassing and public failure, Aaron was still God's choice. In chapter nine, after the seven-day ordination ceremony was completed and Aaron had officially assumed his role, Moses gave him his first assignment as high priest. We find it in verse 2:

Take for yourself a bull calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, both without blemish, and offer them before the Lord. (Leviticus 9:2 ESV)

Before he could make any other sacrifices, Aaron was required to make a sin offering for himself. What is interesting here is that, rather than offering a bull which was the usual sin offering for those who could afford it, Aaron is told to offer a bull CALF. We find the scene in verse 8:

So Aaron drew near to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself.
(Leviticus 9:8 ESV)

The lesson here would not have been lost on the Israelites and it certainly wasn't lost on Aaron. Aaron – the man who had just recently fashioned a golden calf and assisted his people in idol worship – stepped forward as the high priest leading a calf with him to make his very first sacrifice at the altar. It would have been a humbling and powerful display of repentance and redemption.

None of the Israelites would have been tempted to idolize Aaron. From day one, the message was clear – Aaron is a redeemed sinner, just like us. We walk with a limp, and that limp humbles us, and that limp reminds us of our weakness, and that limp causes us to lean even harder on Christ.

Leaders are redeemed sinners and, therefore:

5. Leaders must be consecrated

To consecrate something is to set it apart for holy use. As he stepped into the office of high priest, Aaron was devoting himself to a life of holy service in the tabernacle. This separation was symbolized in the ordination ceremony. Look back at chapter 8, verse 12:

And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him.
(Leviticus 8:12 ESV)

Let's try to get our imaginations back into this scene again. Imagine that you are one of the leaders of the tribes of Israel who have been assembled for this ordination ceremony. The Levites lift their spears and allow you to enter into the tabernacle complex. You crowd in with the other representatives and you keep a safe distance from the tent of meeting where God's glory dwells. Moses approaches, bringing Aaron and his sons forward. They stand together at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Moses takes out a flask of oil and he begins to anoint the tabernacle. He douses the altar seven times and then he moves on to the basin. Finally, he walks back to Aaron and he pours the oil onto Aaron's head and the symbolism is clear. Aaron has officially been set apart for the Lord's work.

Then, after the sin offering and the burnt offering have been made, Moses brings forward a ram for the ordination offering. Aaron and his sons lay their hands on the ram and then, before the whole crowd, the ram

is slain. Moses stoops down and dips his finger in the blood. He stands up and he puts that blood on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. He does the same for Aaron's sons. Then he gathers up some more of the blood and he splashes it against the altar. Once again, the symbolism is clear. These men have been set apart for holy, sacrificial work. They are consecrated. As one commentator notes:

The priest must have consecrated ears ever to listen to God's holy voice; consecrated hands at all times to do holy deeds; and consecrated feet to walk evermore in holy ways.³

What we need more than anything else in our leadership is not charisma, or authenticity, or financial savvy, or intelligence – what we need more than anything in our leadership is holiness. There is no limit to what God can do with a holy people led by holy leaders.

Finally, the Law teaches us that:

6. Leaders are held to a higher standard

The final episode in this three-chapter-long scene highlights the stakes that are involved in all that we have discussed thus far. Look with me at chapter 10 beginning in verse 1:

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. (Leviticus 10:1-3 ESV)

Aaron and his sons have just finished their ordination ceremony. Moses and Aaron concluded the ceremony by going into the tent of meeting to meet with God and, as a sign of His confirmation of this appointment, God sent fire from heaven to consume the burnt offering. The people were amazed! They shouted for joy and fell on their faces! "The LORD approves! The LORD approves! We have priests who will represent us before God, and He approves!" Aaron probably went to bed that night in absolute wonder that God had set him apart for so great an assignment.

³ Dillman as quoted by Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus (NICOT)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 143.

But then, the very next day, Nadab and Abihu dressed in their new garments and equipped with their censers mosey into the tabernacle and begin to light some incense that God never told them to light and begin to worship God haphazardly and the same fire that burst forth in approval the day before bursts out in wrath against the young men. Moses and Aaron rush into the tabernacle to see what has happened.

Can you even begin to imagine that scene? The dread. The grief. The awe.

Moses stands with his grieving brother in silence. The two of them look down at two of Aaron's beloved sons – likely unrecognizable from the effect of the flames – lying in a heap on the floor. Then, with a trembling voice, probably through tears, Moses says, "Aaron, this what God has said. He is holy, and we who serve closest to His presence must not obscure that holiness." Moses says to Aaron almost the same message that God said to him when he struck the rock in the wilderness. "God will be seen as holy."

Aaron could not grieve, because that would suggest to the people that he believed that the Lord's actions were wrong. And they weren't. He couldn't wear sackcloth or cover himself in ashes. He stood silent, and he watched as his cousins carried the bodies of his sons away. He would not allow his response to obscure the message of what had taken place. As one commentator notes:

All saw their presumption; all must see their doom. All saw the law broken by their hands, all must see the broken law honoured in their death.⁴

Leaders who sin publicly need to be rebuked publicly. That is true, Old Testament and New. When Paul wrote to young Timothy who was overseeing the church in Ephesus, he told him:

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. (1 Timothy 5:19-20 ESV)

Leaders are redeemed sinners. Sometimes, leaders fall back into their sin. And when they do, it cannot be taken lightly. The stakes are too high.

On day two, Aaron learned an unforgettable lesson: The stakes are higher in leadership. Aaron learned that:

⁴ Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary On Leviticus*, (Carlisle, PA. The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1966), 198.

The closer a man is to God, the more attention he must pay to holiness and the glory of God.⁵

A pornography addiction is a terrible thing in the life of a young single man – but a pornography addiction in the life of a Christian leader can lead to the ruin of an entire congregation. The greater your influence – the more people who look to you to resemble Christ for them and to teach them what God’s word says – the higher the stakes are when you succumb to sin and hypocrisy.

I imagine that we’re all hearing that through the framework of leadership in the church, and that’s appropriate, but are you also hearing that as parents? Listen closely: If you want to shipwreck the faith of your children, play with sin and try to keep it a secret. If you want to shipwreck the faith of your children, persist in sin and never repent.

Parents, mentors, employers, elders, pastors; if you are in a position of leadership, then you need to understand that your sin is not just your sin. God will hold you to a higher standard. He will be seen as holy in your life – there’s no question about that. The question is, will His holiness be displayed by your careful obedience? Or will it be displayed in His judgement against your disobedience?

That’s what the Law teaches us about leadership.

Implications

We’ve done a great deal of application along the way, but I want to conclude with two pressing implications in light of what we’ve just unpacked. First:

1. Pray for the leaders in your life

Leadership matters. It really does.

One backslidden elder could devastate our little congregation. One hypocritical pastor could set us on a terrible trajectory of disobedience. The YMCA used to be a solid Christian organization. The United Church

⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus (NICOT)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 156.

of Canada used to be the most powerful evangelical force in our country. Years of faithful history can be washed away very quickly when ungodly leaders are given the opportunity to impose their will.

Tonight, at our inaugural AGM, we are going to be affirming our elder team. If we get that vote wrong – even once – we will see terrible consequences in the life of this church. Please come ready. Come prayerfully.

And then, please, continue to pray. Pray that your elders would have wisdom as we navigate through this terribly complicated season. Pray that our marriages would be protected as we give away some of the time that used to be reserved for our wives. Pray that we would know how to be good dads and good elders at the same time. Pray that we would be protected from temptation and the schemes of the evil one. Pray that we would honour the Lord and be a blessing to you.

I also feel compelled to say – please pray for parents and, in particular, for dads. Many of you didn't have a godly example in the home to learn from, and you're navigating through this high stakes assignment with little to no experience to draw from. We want to support you. But we would also admonish you, dads, don't for a second lose sight of the fact that your sin will have generational consequences. Don't indulge those temper tantrums. Don't give an inch to that lust. Don't entertain that rebellious spirit. Wage war with the sin in your life. The little ones are watching you and the stakes are too high. We are praying for you.

I'm out of time but I must conclude on this last note. In light of all that we've unpacked today:

2. Fix your eyes firmly on Jesus

He is the only leader who will never, ever, let you down.

Did your father set a lousy example for you? Fix your eyes on Jesus. Learn from his example. Watch him as power and meekness, justice and mercy, are held in perfect balance. Watch how he responds to the children even when he's exhausted. Listen in as he patiently instructs even after his disciples have failed miserably. Your father may have failed you but Jesus never will.

Have you been stung by leaders in the church? Did they leave you feeling like you were not a priority or were you disillusioned when their sin was exposed? That's awful, and it's wrong, but fix your eyes on Jesus. He is your great high priest. You may have been taught the faith by a hypocrite, but the foundation of your faith is

not in your pastor or your elder – it is in Christ. And Christ will not fail you. He is the sinless, self-sacrificing saviour of your soul. He knows you, and he loves you, and he has redeemed you, and he is with you. If and when everything else around you gives way, if Christ is your foundation, you will still be able to stand.

Leadership matters. It is a gift from God. But every Christian leader that you know is a redeemed sinner. Pray for them. Hold them accountable. And, in the midst of it all, keep your eyes fixed firmly on the Lord Jesus Christ – the only leader who will never let you down. Let's pray.