

Strange Fire

Today In Your Reading...

God gave His commandments concerning what the people of Israel were allowed to eat. Also, the process of consecration, concerning Aaron and his sons, was completed. They were now ready to begin the sacrificial system. In fact, after Aaron, who was now the first High Priest of Israel, made his first sacrifice, God responded by sending fire out from His presence and consuming all that was on the altar. It must have been a memorable occasion, "for when the people saw this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground" (9:24).

However, as we continued reading, we witnessed the tragic mistake of Nadab and Abihu, who offered "strange fire" before the Lord, meaning they offered incense that was not prescribed by God to be burned in the Tabernacle. As a result, both of these men died. Their brothers Eleazar and Ithamar took their place.

It is clear, especially having just come off of that glorious event in which God demonstrated His support of Aaron and his sons into the tragedy of their disobedience, that **God is very serious about His holiness**. *Holiness is an aspect of God that we cannot fathom in our flawed nature and finite mind.* He is perfectly clean, completely pure, unstained by sin. He cannot allow anything offensive in His presence, thus the reason why He gives all of the commands regarding the purity of His people.

In the last few days, we have spent several chapters reading about the elaborate ceremony to purify and consecrate the priests for their service in the Tabernacle. The Lord provided all of the instructions for how to approach Him in a holy manner. Everything had to happen exactly as He prescribed, yet Nadab and Abihu immediately neglected these instructions and attempted to do things their own way. In this manner,

God's holy presence was dishonored and, therefore, shamed before others. He was not about to let these men get away with their blatant disregard for His holiness or His sanctuary.

Herein lies a stark warning — **we approach the Lord on His terms, not our own**. We cannot enter into His presence our way. We do not tell Him how we will be saved or what He must do for us. Instead, He tells us how we can be saved. We are the creature; He is the Creator. **If we trust in our own works to be enough for salvation, we will get burned.**

Daily Reflection

God calls you to worship Him in spirit and in truth, meaning that He deserves to be worshiped as He prescribes, not as you wish. What are ways that you might bring "strange fire" into the presence of the Lord?

Your God is a holy God, high and lifted up, seated on His throne in heaven. Be careful how you approach Him. Come to Him in humility, not in pride, with reverence, not in disrespect, and in a way that honors rather than dishonors Him. "Cleanse your hands, you sinner," says James, "and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Enter the Lord's presence with fear and awe.

"I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (*Leviticus 11:44*).

Spiritual Leprosy

Today In Your Reading...

We read the exciting laws regarding purification after childbirth, contagious skin diseases, and contaminated clothing! What a great day, right? Having had to endure a receding hairline my entire life, I was comforted by the fact that “if a man loses his hair and his head becomes bald, he is still ceremonially clean” (12:40).

Hidden in our passage today were two institutions that are important in the Jewish culture — the laws regarding circumcision and leprosy. Did you catch the command that all boys must be circumcised on the eighth day (12:3)? Circumcision is connected to the covenant God made with Abraham (*Genesis 17:9, 10*). We will see this ritual repeated throughout Scripture. Even Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day when He was presented in the Temple (*Luke 2:21*).

The laws regarding contagious skin diseases, such as leprosy, were pretty extensive; but, these passages explain the harsh treatment that lepers received in the Jewish culture. Even in the New Testament, we see these guidelines being followed. Lepers were made to live outside the camp, so as not to infect other people. They had to wear torn and tattered clothes and cry out, “Unclean,” anytime someone approached.

In a spiritual sense, every person is born with leprosy; it is called sin. Because of sin, we are all unclean, and because we are unclean, we are not allowed into God’s presence. We are not one of His people and, thus, are made to live “outside the camp.” However, *because of Christ, our spiritual leprosy has been cured* and we are adopted into His family. We are made clean, and, thus, able to stand in the presence of God!

Did you notice what God instructed to be done to purify a person with leprosy? They were completely washed in water and shaved of all their

hair (8, 9). In other words, their old life was removed or cleansed, and they were welcomed back into the camp. Then, they had to offer sacrifice, during which they were anointed with oil and marked in blood (13:15-18; 23-25). All of these things are symbols of baptism, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the washing away of sins by the blood of Jesus Christ.

August M. Toplady wrote a song in 1763 entitled “Rock of Ages.” Here is the first stanza, “Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee; let the water and the blood from Thy riven side, which flowed, be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.”

Daily Reflection

If you are in Christ, you are clean! Your old self, your old life, your old ways are gone, and you are a new person. Describe the evidence in your life that this new person exists. How can you tell that something has changed in you?

Unfortunately, many Christians, who have been cured of their “spiritual leprosy” and who have been adopted as a member of God’s family, still live “outside the camp.” They are not joining others in the community of “cured lepers.” Are you doing life with other believers? Are you an active member of a local church? Are you still living the old life? You are now clean! **Do not waste your life living as if you are unclean.**

The Scapegoat

Today In Your Reading...

Moses received instructions for the most important event of the year — the Day of Atonement (or *Yom Kippur*), when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was, and made atonement for the sins of the people with the blood of a sacrifice. The High Priest was not allowed into that room at any other time of the year or he would die. It represented the presence of God on earth.

While the process itself is somewhat complicated, there are some key elements that warrant our attention. First, the fact that this event only occurred once a year, and that it had to happen a certain way, exalted the holiness of God in the eyes of the people. They could not enter His presence any time they wanted. "Warn your brother Aaron," the Lord told Moses, "not to enter the Most Holy Place behind the curtain whenever he chooses; the penalty for intrusion is death" (16:3).

Second, the reason why the people could not approach God so freely was because of their sin. The sins of the people were defiling; their rebellion corrupted all they did (16:16). The gap between God and His people could not be any further. Thus, they could not approach Him and were in great need of atonement.

Third, the sins of the people were symbolically transferred to the scapegoat. When the priest laid his hands on the goat, he was, in essence, passing the sins of the people onto the animal. Then, the animal was led into the desert, a visual reminder of God's forgiveness; their sins were no more. "After the man sets it free in the wilderness, the goat will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land" (16:22).

Christ is our scapegoat. Though He had no sins of His own, our sins were transferred to Him on the cross (2 *Corinthians 5:21*).

Finally, atonement for sin can only be achieved with blood. "Aaron must slaughter the goat as a sin offering for the people and bring its blood behind the inner curtain. Then, he will sprinkle blood on the atonement cover and against the front of the Ark" (16:15). The wages of sin is death; therefore, blood is the only acceptable offering for atonement.

Christ is our blood goat, our atonement. By laying down His sinless life on our behalf, He reconciled our sinful souls for all time. "These things were only a shadow of the good things to come; they could never, by the same sacrifices which they offered continually year after year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins; but, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, we have been sanctified once for all" (*Hebrews 10:1-11*).

Daily Reflection

How does this wonderful truth intersect with daily life? How should you live in light of what Christ has done for you?

If you are in Christ, you are a new creature. You can cease striving with God. You do not have to prove yourself to Him, perform for His favor, or earn your way into His presence. You are forever clean! **Because of Christ, you can rest.**

Different and Distinct

February 22 — *Leviticus 17:1-19:37*

Day 53— 312 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We covered a number of topics, everything from the blood of the atonement to idolatry and immoral relationships. God gave Moses and the people of Israel quite a list of statutes to live by. Of the three types of laws God handed down, these commandments fall into the category of civil laws, which were meant to provide Israel with guidelines for how to act like a civilized nation.

The distinction that was expected by God between Israel and other nations is pretty obvious. He made it clear that He did not want His people to be anything like the world around them. "Do not act like the people of Egypt, where you used to live," He said, "nor like the people of Canaan where I am taking you. You must not imitate their way of life. You must obey all of my regulations and be careful to keep my laws, for I, the Lord, am your God" (*Leviticus 18:3, 4*).

His reason for Israel's separation from the ways of other nations was that He was their God. They were to worship Him now, Him alone; and **He is holy, so He expected them to be holy and set apart.**

As I read the list of things that other nations did, and how they were an abomination to the Lord, I didn't have to wonder why God wanted His people to be separate. **The world's ways are sick and perverted.** Their deeds reflect the desires of their flesh, and God expects more of His people than to live for simple selfish pleasures. The Lord still has similar expectations of His people today, for them to be different.

I'm not referring to the Jews; I'm referring to Christians. *His expectation of holiness still holds true for you and I*, if we have come to know Christ as our Savior. With a regenerated heart, because of the atoning blood of Christ, and the

indwelling of the Holy Spirit, **our lives should reflect on the outside the holiness that is on the inside.** Our lives should be different than the rest of the world. We should look nothing like it. In fact, God wants us to be set apart, so that we might be an example of what He can do in the lives of people.

Daily Reflection

If you looked at every area of your life, how are you doing at separating from the world's ways?

Is it obvious to others that you are different? Is it obvious to others that God is at work in your life? Why or why not?

"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (*Romans 12:2*).

Holy Is His Name

Today In Your Reading...

God gave Moses instructions regarding punishments for some of the offenses listed in previous chapters. He also provided more details on who can serve as priests and the type of offerings that they can and cannot use.

When we read passages like these, two things happen. Because they are so foreign and, at times, gross, we tend to skip over them; or, if we do read them, we tend to walk away with a negative view of God and His Word. After all, punishment for most of these offenses was death. For example, "All who curse their father or mother must be put to death. They are guilty of a capital offense" (20:9). Really?

We must proceed with caution here and remember a few things. First, these civil laws were for Israel and do not apply to us today. Second, *we must be careful not to impose our warped opinions or flawed perspectives on the Lord, His chosen nation, or the times in which they lived.* Third, we must realize that these terrible things were being committed by the Canaanites, and they were the reasons why the Lord was bringing judgment upon them. He was trying to prevent Israel from repeating these offenses so that the "land would not vomit them out" (20:22).

In regards to killing kids who curse their parents, we must put this law into context; it was for severe cases only. Rebellion had to be an ongoing problem, beyond what the parents could handle (*Deut. 21:18-21*). The situation had to be investigated by the elders and a ruling made. The Lord was protecting his nation by protecting their families; and, a child, in flagrant defiance of his parents, was not only a threat to the family but was rebelling against the Lord.

Finally, we cannot miss the resounding theme of these difficult passages — **God's holiness**

(20:3, 7, 8, 26; 21:8, 15; 22:2, 9, 16, 31-33). "Do not treat my holy name as common and ordinary," says the Lord. "I must be treated as holy by the people, for it is I who makes you holy" (22:32). The Lord is holy, meaning without stain or blemish, absolutely perfect; and, He expects His people, that's us, to be holy, which we cannot do without His help. He is the one who makes us holy through Christ.

Daily Reflection

How does this relate to you today, that God is holy and that He expects you to be holy?

Your lifestyle, your thoughts and words, speaks loudly of how you view the Lord. Is He holy to you? Do you honor His words with your activities or disdain them with your sin? Do you treat God's name and character as ordinary, or do you refer to Him with fear and reverence?

The people of Israel were not expected to obey God's laws to earn their salvation; that is impossible. They were expected to obey His laws and be holy themselves, because they represented Him on the earth. Today, **you are one of His representatives**. Be holy as He is holy.

"There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides You. There is no Rock like our God" (*1 Samuel 2:2*).

Trust and Rest

February 24 — *Leviticus 23:1-25:23*

Day 55 — 310 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

God described all of the fixed festivals that He wanted His people to celebrate. The list included Passover, the Festivals of Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, Pentecost or the Festival of Harvest, and the Festival of Shelters (or Booths, Tents). All of these holy days were instituted to remind God's people of all that He had done for them both individually and collectively.

God also reminded Moses and the Israelites to honor the Sabbath Day commandment. Then, He initiated two more special times — the Sabbatical Year and the Year of Jubilee.

Oftentimes, when reading through the Old Testament, people tend to focus on God's wrath but seem to overlook His goodness. He is kind, forgiving, and charitable. For example, God told the people not to harvest the corners of their land so that the needy could glean enough to eat. He ordered a Year of Jubilee in which everyone indebted to others was freed from their debt. He instituted days of rest such as the Sabbath, the Sabbatical Year, and all the time off during their annual festivals. **God is good, even in the Old Testament.**

Now, resting once a week would not have been a problem for me. Even missing time off for all of the holidays would have been nice. But this Sabbatical Year idea? Wow! Let's talk about this one.

The Israelites were asked to work on the land for six years, but on the seventh year, they were commanded to let the land rest. When the Year of Jubilee came around, every 50 years, the people were commanded to let the land rest two years. The natural question they would have had was, "What will we eat during the seventh year, since we are not allowed to plant or har-

vest crops that year?" (25:20). Good question. God's response was, "I will order My blessing for you in the sixth year so that the land will produce a bumper crop, enough to support you for three years" (25:21). In essence, **God told His people to trust Him. He would provide.**

Daily Reflection

These periods of rest were meant to be a blessing to the people, to remind them that it is the Lord who provided for their needs, that He loved them, and that He would take care of them. However, these periods of rest would have been tremendous tests of faith. The people had to trust that the Lord would do what He promised, that He would indeed provide for their needs.

Trust and rest. These two actions don't seem to be related. When we wait on the Lord to meet a need, rest is not usually one of our natural tendencies. Trust and worry would be a better combination, right? No, trust and worry are opposites, are they not? If we worry, then are we really trusting? And, if we truly trust the Lord, will we worry or fret? *True faith or trust will produce a confidence in the Lord, and in that confidence we will rest.*

What about you? How do you handle trusting and resting?

"The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You" (*Isaiah 26:3*).

A Call to Obedience

February 25 — *Leviticus 25:24-26:46*

Today In Your Reading...

God handed down His laws of redemption and how to handle those who were poor among them. Basically, God was providing Israel with more guidelines so that it would know how to function properly in the land of Canaan.

However, the most important part of our reading today was God's warnings concerning Israel's national obedience. He promised, "If you keep My laws and are careful to obey My commands, I will send the seasonal rains. The land will yield its crops, and the trees will produce their fruit" (26:3).

He went on to describe all of the many blessings that would come as a result of the nation's faithfulness to Him; but, then He spelled out what would happen if they chose the other path, "If you do not listen to Me or obey My commands, and if you break My covenant by rejecting its laws and treating My regulations with contempt, I will punish you" (26:14, 15). From there, God added many specific details regarding His response in the case of Israel's unfaithfulness. These warnings surely caused Israel to fear Him.

It is not difficult to get the message that the Lord intended to communicate — **obedience is rewarded with blessing, while disobedience warrants consequences**. Is this not a lesson that we learn early in life, when we are children? When I obeyed my parents, things typically went well for me. I enjoyed a favorable relationship with Mom and Dad; but, when I defied their authority or disobeyed their rules, I suffered the consequences and my relationship with them was hindered by my rebellion.

Why would we expect anything different in our relationship with God? Shouldn't we expect a favorable response for our obedience to His words? Likewise, shouldn't we expect that there

would be consequences for sinning against Him? Of course, **we cannot expect the blessings of God in our lives while we disdain the words and commandments of God.**

I want to be clear regarding God's blessings for obedience; I am not advocating a "health and wealth" doctrine, that by following all of His statutes we will become millionaires and live to be a hundred. We have already seen that God's people experience hardship and suffering. Let us not forget Abraham, Joseph, or Job. I am also not advocating salvation by works or obedience to God out of fear of judgment. For the followers of Christ, there is no judgment of sin (*Romans 8:1, 2*). **We obey God's commandments out of love not fear** (*John 14:15, 21*).

Daily Reflection

So then, what am I advocating, if not these things? **Your obedience to God demonstrates your love for Him and faithfulness to Him.** Your obedience also glorifies Him and brings His blessings on your life (*Psalms 1:1-3; James 1:22-25*). You will live in freedom, with joy and confidence in the Lord, with the blessing of an intimate, fruitful relationship with Him.

Imagine a life in which you did your best to obey God's Word. What would that life be like?

It is when we say no to God that a lock is placed on the door of His blessings and our spiritual lives seem mundane and uneventful. **Obey the Word of God and see what He will do!**