

Leviticus 10:1-11 • Strange Fire

Introduction

One of the indications of someone that is truly steeped in the wrong belief is when they utter the words, “But we all serve the same God”. They are incorrectly focusing on the word “God” in that phrase when what they really need to consider is the word “serve”. Through His Word, God has dictated the **only** approved and proper ways to serve Him—all other ways result in being rejected by Him even if we claim what we’re doing is for Him. We are not allowed to serve Him in any old way we like.

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Matthew 7:13-14

This is not about ritual as much as it is the condition of one’s heart, the degree of one’s faithfulness to God’s Word. In Nadab and Abihu we have an example that continues around us to this day that **how** one serves God is not just important to God personally, but a matter of life and death for us individually.

¹Now 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. ²And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³Then 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.

⁴Moses 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.” ⁵So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said.

[Read v.1-5]

Q: There are a LOT of problems with what Nadab and Abihu did, so let’s understand each and how they combine into a greater picture of error than what appears at first glance. On Whom does the duty fall to offer incense to the Lord in the tabernacle?

A: The High Priest alone, in this case Aaron.

Q: Where is incense offered?

A: On the alter just outside the Holy of Holies, a place not everyone was allowed to enter, not even everyone in the priesthood.

Q: When the High Priest entered the Holy Place to burn incense, how many others were to go in and assist him?

A: None. Only one person at a time was supposed to go in.

Q: So to this point, not even addressing the issue of “strange fire”, summarize what’s wrong with their actions.

1. They are usurping the authority and role of the High Priest.
2. They are coming before the Lord in the wrong way, not as He instructed.
3. They are worshiping God incorrectly, against His direct commandments.

Q: Moving on, from where was the fire supposed to come that was used to light the incense?

A: It should have come from the altar on which God’s fire descended from heaven. They were commanded to keep that fire going.

Q: But where did they get the fire they used?

A: Probably from one of the fires boiling the sacrificial meat the priests were to eat, but certainly not from the altar as dictated.

Q: Why was the combination of incense and fire that they presented called “strange fire”?

A: Because it was not a formula or requirement according to the Law given to them by God through Moses. It was something of their own design—a substitute or something new; an invention of man.

Q: Based on Moses' quote of the Law in v.3, what can we deduce was the bottom line issues with their actions? Why did God destroy them?

1. "I will be treated as holy". By definition this means that nothing unclean is allowed in His presence; therefore what they were doing was deemed unclean.
2. "Before all the people I will be honored". Their casual dismissal of God's commandments was a public testimony of their mistreatment of God.

Q: What might Nadab and Abihu be examples of? What might they represent?

1. The misapplication of love, when someone performs religious duties, prays to God, or praises Him without any cordial affection.
2. Someone that is not obedient out of love but from a selfish view.
3. Someone possessed of an ignorant, false, or misguided zeal, a zeal that is not fully grounded in God's knowledge and truth.
4. Someone that is superstitious.
5. Someone that is hypocritical.
6. Someone devoted to false and strange doctrines that are not based on God's Word but instead come from his own or another's inventions.
7. Others?

Q: What might be considered ironic about the way that they were killed?

A: They sinned by offering fire and were in turn punished by fire.

For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Matthew 7:2

Q: If the fire "consumed" them, why are there still bodies to be carried out "still in their tunics"?

A: The act of being consumed is more akin to being struck by lightning, wherein such has been noted to not even leave a mark on the clothes. Their lives—their very souls—were taken from them, the biblical equivalent of eternal death as well as physical death.

Q: Why is it significant that they were carried out and buried in their tunics?

A: These were the special clothes of the priesthood that had just undergone consecration, in which they had been ordained as priests. It would serve as a very visible and public lesson that the things of God do not make one clean and can become unclean because of the person misusing them.

Q: What is the parallel here to what happened within Israel when God first gave the Law to them through Moses?

A: Just as Israel pledged obedience to the covenant of the Law and then turned right around and began wrongly worshiping a golden calf, so these members of the priesthood, immediately after having been given the Levitical Law and undergoing ordination, have immediately engaged in wrong and unlawful worship of God. Both groups broke God's commandments.

Q: According to v.3, did God destroy them because they weren't holy?

A: Technically no man can be holy, only "covered". However, the exact charge is how **God** will be treated.

Application: How do you "treat" God in the way you approach Him?

Q: Working this backwards a bit, based on the statement in v.3, “before all the people I will be honored”, how might we know that spiritual leaders are performing well according to God’s standards?

A: Their congregation is worshiping God correctly according to His will by keeping His Law, treating Him as holy, worshiping not just in Spirit but truth.

Q: How are Nadab and Abihu examples of false teachers within the church? How might they help us identify someone that is “wearing the clothes”, so to speak, but actually acting from their own self-interest?

1. Their actions may look legitimate, but they contradict Scripture.
2. They are more interested in elevating themselves than recognizing God’s established leaders.
3. They mix the things of God with the things of this world.
4. They invent something new.

Application: Go through each of the above 4 points and give examples of a person or organization that might fit at least one these descriptions. How will you determine for sure whether your feeling is right or not?

[Read v.6-7]

⁶Then 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. ⁷You 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.

Q: Given that we have to deal with someone that is proven to be a false prophet or false teacher, what is the application for us in Moses’ instructions to Aaron and his remaining sons?

A: We are not to allow the matter to consume us to the point of disrupting our service—our worship and ministry—for God. This would be a kind of “victory” for their side even in the wake of defeat.

Q: How did people mourn at this time? How are Moses’ instructions speaking to this issue?

A: They would uncover their heads and tear their clothes. These are explicit instructions against engaging in mourning.

Q: Why does Moses include the warning, “so that you will not die”?

A: God has no pity or mercy for uncleanness, particularly as it is exhibited in false teaching and doctrine. It is not a thing to be emotional about in the same way as the loss of someone or something that is cherished.

Point: We are not to treat the “death” or removal of false teachers and false prophets the same way we treat the death of family or loved ones or the falling away of someone into sin. Leadership must carry on as an example to the congregation.

Application: How might this differ from those that preach that we should always “love” regardless of the circumstances and to never be “divisive” or “judgmental”? How are we to treat purported fellow Believers when they engage in and/or espouse strange or wrong doctrine?

⁸The 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—¹⁰and so as
to make a distinction between the holy
and the profane, and between the unclean
and the clean,¹¹and so as to teach the
sons of Israel all the statutes which the
LORD has spoken to them through
Moses.”

[Read v.8-11]

Q: What does the reference to drinking tell us about Nadab and Abihu?

A: That there's a strong possibility that they were drunk when they did what they did.

Q: What do liquids represent throughout Scripture?

A: Different aspects of the Holy Spirit and false spirits.

Q: Therefore, given their examples as false teachers, what else might this teaching regarding drinking relate to?

A: Worshiping and serving according to the Holy Spirit and not under the influence of a false spirit, false doctrine.

Q: What is the key benefit to maintaining a sober spirit, to worshiping according to the Holy Spirit?

A: Discernment. (v.10) This is how we can make the right distinction between the profaned and unprofaned use of God's things and doctrine.

Q: How does v.11 tie together the overall discussion of what has been going on and what is represented by Nadab and Abihu?

A: The commission to properly teach God's Law. It's not just about knowledge, but putting it into action, passing it along by living it as well as preaching it.

Overall Application

- *How do we identify false prophets and false teachers? How can we know for sure even when they hold esteemed positions or provide a similar appearance to true teachers?*

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Matthew 18:15

- *Why does this admonition in Matthew not apply to false teachers? Do you see the difference in the way Jesus treated the Pharisees from “sinners”? What is the example for us?*
- *How do we approach God personally? How well do we consider His nature and character and what that might require on our part?*