

Subject: *The Problem of Unacceptable Worship*

Scripture: *Leviticus 10:1-11*

In previous sermons we have considered the biblical principles for acceptable worship. Now we are going to look at the problem of unacceptable worship. In Scripture we find guidelines for what is acceptable to God and we see “guardrails” that keep us from danger and even destruction. God is serious about worship, and He expects us to worship Him in a serious and appropriate manner. God doesn’t expect worship to be perfect, but He does expect worship to be reverent and according to His prescribed will. In Exodus and Leviticus we have chapter after chapter in which God tells Moses and the people how to worship. He gives them the details of the Tabernacle and its contents, the priests and their clothing, and all the offerings.

This is one of the most tragic events recorded in Scripture. God sent fire from heaven to consume two priests while they worshiped in the tabernacle. The men who were killed were the sons of Aaron and nephews of Moses. What does an Old Testament story like this have to do with Christians today? This story is relevant to us for two main reasons:

- God is holy and we are to be holy

1 Peter 1:15-16¹⁵ *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;*¹⁶ *Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*

- We serve as priests unto God

1 Peter 2:5 *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

God never changes, but His actions may change. Obviously God does not kill people today when they offer unacceptable worship, but His attitude toward it has not changed.

1. THE SACRED FIRE OF GOD (9:22-24)

It is important that we see the context of this story.

- A. God’s priest blessed the people (9:22)

The full form of this blessing is found in ***Numbers 6:24-26***²⁴ *The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:*²⁵ *The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:*²⁶ *The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*

- B. God’s glory appeared to the people (9:23)

- C. God’s fire consumed the offering (9:24)

2. THE STRANGE FIRE OF THE PRIESTS (10:1)

Nadab and Abihu offered fire that was not authorized by God. They did something God had not commanded. This was not a sin of ignorance or innocence, but a sin of arrogance.

3. THE SUDDEN FIRE OF GOD’S JUDGMENT (10:2)

In 9:24 the fire consumed the offering. In 10:2 the fire of God consumed the offerers. It was a case of sudden death in the tabernacle. **Hebrews 12:29** *For our God is a consuming fire.*

4. THE SOBERING REMINDER OF GOD'S HOLINESS (10:3)

A. God is to be sanctified by the priests

He is to be set apart and be treated as holy.

B. God is to be glorified before the people

Aaron had nothing to say because he knew that God was holy. He knew that you can't play around with the things of God and treat holy things in a trivial way. This was basically the same thing that happened in the church of Corinth concerning the irreverent use of the Lord's Supper. Some were killed for treating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy or trivial manner.

Why would these men dare to offer unauthorized fire? More than likely they had been drinking and were under the influence of alcohol. See Leviticus 10:8-11.

5. THE SOLEMN MOURNING FOR THE DEAD (10:4-7)

This was not a typical funeral. Aaron and his family were not allowed to show signs of personal grief because this was God's righteous judgment. They were not even allowed to go in the funeral procession as they carried the dead men outside the camp. God required them to stay in the tabernacle and finish their priestly duties. All the other people mourned because of God's judgment. They grieved not only the loss of these men, but for their sin that had so deeply offended God.

APPLYING THIS MESSAGE

- Worship God in reverence and godly fear

Psalms 89:7 *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.*

Hebrews 12:28-29²⁸ *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:*²⁹ *For our God is a consuming fire.*

- Remember that great privilege comes with great responsibility

Jesus said: "To whom much is given, much will also be required."

- Never treat holy things in a casual way

People who come to church often can often take the things of God for granted. We should always remember that when we enter God's presence to worship we are standing on holy ground.