

Elementary

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

*I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.
(Leviticus 26:12 ESV)*

What Does The Law Teach Us About Leaders?

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Leviticus 10:1-11

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Leviticus 10:1. This morning we are trying to answer the question: “What does the Law – and more specifically – what does the Book of Leviticus teach us about leaders?”

Now there is a sense in which we are all leaders in the New Testament church – we’re a kingdom of priests – we’re all teachers, evangelists and disciple makers - so these things apply to all of us in a general sense - and yet, even in a kingdom of priests, there are leaders. There are pastors, elders, and parents to name just a few. So everything we are going to say today applies to all of us generally and to some of us more specifically.

Leadership is actually a fairly major theme in the Book of Leviticus and it occupies a pretty significant chunk of the middle section of the book. All of chapters 8, 9 and 10 have to do with the ordination and installation of the priesthood. For the sake of time, however, we are going to focus mostly on one dramatic event in particular that takes place very early on in the ministry of two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu. So hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1 of chapter 10.

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.

⁴ And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, “Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp.”⁵ So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said.⁶ And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, “Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled.⁷ And do not go outside the entrance of the tent 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 And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying,⁹ “Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.¹⁰ You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean,¹¹ and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.” (Leviticus 10:1–11 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

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Now it’s hard to say for sure, but a number of commentators believe that this incident takes place on the FIRST DAY OF ORDAINED SERVICE for Nabad and Abihu, so R.K. Harrison for example says here:

“Chapter 10 makes clear how swiftly divine retribution came upon those who refused to follow the guidelines, and insisted instead upon pursuing an independent course.”¹

Now, remember Calvin said that the ceremonial law is a TUTELAGE – it was about teaching the people of God in their INFANCY – and this story is about God SMACKING HIS RULER down on the desk in the front row to get everyone’s attention. Do you remember when teachers would

¹ R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 111.

do that? Well that's what God is doing here. He is saying: PAY ATTENTION class, because leadership really matters. I think the first lesson is pretty obvious. This story is reminding us that:

1. Leaders need to be followers

That's comes across loud and clear in this story doesn't it? Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. Now we don't know exactly what that means. Some commentators say that they deviated from the instructions about the coals or the preparation of the incense. Some say that they may have been conducting Egyptian rituals – or maybe Canaanite rituals – the point is they were deviating from the playbook rather significantly. As Harrison said, they:

“refused to follow the guidelines, and insisted instead upon pursuing an independent course.”²

And fire came out from the Lord and consumed them.

So here's our first lesson, class: LEADERS need to be learners. Leaders need to be followers. Teachers need to be OBEYERS.

Have I got that right?

We are not the AUTHORITY!! We don't invent the content! We don't have editing privileges over the program. We are in the DELIVERY BUSINESS – not the production business. We are waiters, not chefs. We take from God's table and we deliver it into the mouths of his people.

I think I told you before that Calvin said in his commentary on Job that the job of a pastor is analogous to the job of a mother bird: you take hunks of meat and you chew it up small and you hork into the mouths of babes – that's the job. And that's just as true for a parent isn't it? One of the main reasons we started the Into The Word podcast is to help you as parents lead an effective family devotion time in your home. I'll hork the chunks into your mouth and then you chew them up just a bit more and hork them into the mouths of the little ones around your table – I realize

² R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 111.

that's a disgusting metaphor, but blame John Calvin. Once I heard that I could not unhear that. That metaphor has defined my ministry and it should define your ministry as a parent.

That's the game friends! We're in the delivery business – not the production business. We don't make up stuff – we repeat stuff. We regurgitate stuff. We learn and then we teach. We follow and then we bring others along. That's what LEADERSHIP IS in the kingdom of God and if you depart from that pattern you get fried. That's the lesson here – in very stark and simplified terms.

The second thing we see here is that:

2. Leaders must be entirely consecrated

Go back to chapter 9 for just a second. Chapters 8 and 9 narrate the ordination service for Aaron and his sons and then chapter 10 gives us their first day at work, which as we saw, didn't go very well. But in chapter 9 the order of the sacrifices is very interesting. The first sacrifice that Aaron offers as an ordained priest is actually an atonement offering for his own sin, we see that 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)

Aaron was a sinner – in fact this story takes place not long after the incident with the Golden Calf which was definitely not Aaron's finest hour – in fact that's why many scholars believe that Aaron was commanded to offer a CALF for his offering – normally it could be any male bull – but God is more specific here, he calls for a CALF – because Aaron sinned with a calf. So maybe the point here is that you can't be a leader until you deal with your sin. Not your sin GENERALLY but your sin SPECIFICALLY. But now look at the second sacrifice he made that day; look at verse 12:

Then he killed **the burnt offering**, and Aaron's sons handed him the blood, and he threw it against the sides of the altar. (Leviticus 9:12 ESV)

The burnt offering was a symbol of total consecration. Most of the offerings were only partial – somebody took this piece home and somebody took that piece home – but with the BURNT OFFERING the whole animal was burnt up on the alter.

It was ALL FOR GOD.

Again the SYMBOLISM here is pretty powerful – and pretty obvious. Remember, Leviticus is KINDERGARTEN! Everything is pitched at the most BASIC LEVEL. If you start over thinking things in Leviticus, that’s when you get in trouble. God is teaching in bold capital letters here: he is saying LEADERSHIP in the kingdom of God is a WHOLE LIFE COMMITMENT. These aren’t “volunteer hours”. This isn’t a “religious hobby” – THIS IS IT!!! This is your life. In our out friend. There is no room for half committed leaders in the Kingdom of God. You put your life on the alter – or you go home!

Your service for God is the BIG ROCK. It is the TOP PRIORITY. It takes precedence even over normal family life. That’s part of this story too, isn’t it?

Aaron and his other sons were FORBIDDEN TO MOURN over Nadab and Abihu the way that custom and tradition dictated they should – did you notice that? Their uncles and their cousins had to step in and take care of the funeral arrangements. Why? Because the priesthood was all of the sudden VERY SHORT STAFFED and the worship of the people MUST GO ON! Look at verses 6-7 again:

“And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, “Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the LORD has kindled. ⁷ And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you.” And they did according to the word of Moses.”
(Leviticus 10:6-7 ESV)

So you don’t get to take 3 weeks off on bereavement leave – we’ve got service tomorrow!! And you don’t get to act angry – because your primary loyalty needs to be to ME – and everybody needs to see that. You don’t get to even LOOK SAD – why? Because you are on duty. If the

guards outside the Queen's palace aren't allowed to indulge their emotions – if they have to remain focused on their duty no matter what – how much more you, when you are serving the God of the universe?

That's what is going on here. Are you up for that? Because that's what it means in the New Testament when Paul calls on people to offer their lives a LIVING SACRIFICE HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD as their spiritual service of worship. He's saying: be a burnt offering. Be all in. You have all eternity to be served and to be full and to be at peace. So from the moment of your salvation to the moment of your death – BE ALL IN!

That's the call. That's leadership in the kingdom of God – Old Testament and New.

The third lesson – and maybe the most obvious lesson that we get out of this story is that:

3. Leaders are held to a higher standard

Again – first day on the job, just getting the hang of things and BOOM – fire comes out from the Lord and consumes them. The reason for this incredibly high standard is given by God in verse 3; he says:

‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’

Are you seeing that? The more you know, the more you are accountable for. The more obviously you represent God the more severe God will be in his management of you. Right? Those are the principles that are playing out in this story. These brothers had SEEN some things about God – they'd been halfway up the mountain with Moses; we get that story in Exodus 24:9-11:

Then Moses and Aaron, **Nadab, and Abihu**, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up,¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.¹¹ And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (Exodus 24:9–11 ESV)

So these men had SEEN GOD in a way that most people had not. They had extra revelation. They had experience. They had insight. They had privilege. But things like that come at a certain cost, as Jesus said:

“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (Luke 12:48 ESV)

Are you hearing that? The more you know, the more you are responsible for. The closer you are – the higher the bar – that’s the main idea – that’s the ELEMENTARY principle we better make sure we don’t miss, because we’ve seen some stuff. We’ve been shown things that Nadab and Abihu could never have even imagined. We are living on the other side of the empty tomb and the gift of the Holy Spirit – so we have been given MUCH and therefore, much will be required of us.

That’s true for ALL OF US generally, and for teachers and preachers in particular. James, the brother of the Lord says:

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” (James 3:1 ESV)

So the more you know, the higher the bar – and the more obviously or immediately you represent God, the more severe the punishment will be if you misrepresent God. Pastor Rob talked about that last week – the sins of the leaders CUT DEEPER. Jesus talked about that too – and he warned his disciples not to play around with this. He said TO HIS DISCIPLES in Mark 9:42 – in a locked room – so this is not a CROWD teaching, this is something he said to the 12 disciples:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” (Mark 9:42 ESV)

How are the priests and pastors involved in the sexual abuse of minors going to stand before the Lord on Judgment Day? How are they going to avoid being cast into the deepest pit of hell? To be a priest – to stand before children as the VICAR OF CHRIST – oh, if you are going to use

those terms then you better make sure you ACT LIKE CHRIST or you will suffer the punishment promised by Christ in Mark 9:42!!

But the same is true for parents.

Dads, if you make it impossible for your little ones to call God their “Father” because you are abusive or unloving or drunken or unkind to their mother – then you bring this verse down on your heads as well.

You want to stand between God and little ones then you better not OBSCURE THE VIEW – that’s what the text is saying here. That’s the elementary principle, and we ignore that principle at our peril.

So can we just stop here for a second and turn this into a call to prayer? We need to pray for the church in general – we are a kingdom of priests! We all stand before God and little ones!! So let’s pray for us. Let’s pray that we would commend Christ and not discredit him in the eyes of those in our charge. But let’s pray for pastors, elders and parents in particular. Let’s commit to that. This church is one sex scandal in the pastorate or one financial scandal at the board table away from FORFEITING ITS WITNESS in the community FOREVER! That would be HORRIBLE. A millstone around your neck as you are cast into the lake of fire would be even worse – so pray for your pastors, your elders and the parents and teachers of this church – would you commit to doing that?

God help us.

Fourthly, and perhaps counter intuitively, given all we’ve just said:

4. Leaders are a gift from God

We need to be clear here that the priesthood was not some foolish idea that the people came up with, it was a great idea that GOD CAME UP WITH.

Look at chapter 8 verses 1-4.

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.³ And assemble all the congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” (Leviticus 8:1–3 ESV)

So God takes the initiative here. He says: “You know what you people need? Some leaders, so I’m going to go ahead and ordain some for you.”

Human beings need leadership – whether they’re saved or not – they need leadership.

We see the same thing in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul says:

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

Do you see that?

And. He. Gave.

Old Testament and New – we need human leaders to become the people God created and saved us to be.

My friend Tim tells the story of a time when his wife discovered a cancerous spot on his back. He couldn’t see it – because it was on his back – but they were at the cottage and they were swimming so he had his shirt off and she came up behind him and said: “What is this?” And of course, he had no idea what “this” was, because he couldn’t see it – but she could and so he went and got it checked out and they were able to deal with it before it became a serious problem.

That’s a little parable about one of the reasons why we need leaders. We need leaders, in part, because we have blind spots. There are things about us that we cannot or sometimes will not see. That’s corrective leadership – as human beings, we need CONSTRUCTIVE LEADERSHIP and CORRECTIVE LEADERSHIP. We need someone to spend 20 hours a week studying the

Scriptures so they can FEED US and build us up on Sunday morning – and then sometimes we need leaders who will slap our hands, yank our chains and get in our face a little bit. The Bible talks about that. That’s one of the main things Paul tells Titus to look for in prospective elders. He says:

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine **and also to rebuke** those who contradict it. (Titus 1:9 ESV)

We need that! We need constructive and corrective leadership!

But some of us don’t seem to know that. There are folks sitting in here this morning who have been coming out for years – some have been coming out for decades – without ever taking on membership. Membership is the process whereby you ask the leaders of this church to watch over you. They won’t do it – they can’t do it – unless you give them permission – and that’s what membership is and that’s why some people never take it. They don’t WANT anyone watching over them. They don’t want anyone holding them accountable – but listen to me friends – you need that. I need that. We all need that. We all have blind spots and we all have issues and problems we can’t manage on our own. So leaders are a gift. They are given by the Lord to help his people grow into all that they were saved and created to be.

And then lastly here in this story, we are reminded that:

5. Leaders are supposed to point to Jesus

Again, look at the explanation God gives for the severe action that he takes in this story. He says:

“Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.” (Leviticus 10:3 ESV)

You see, leaders are supposed to say something good and glorious about God. Leaders are supposed to facilitate the worship and enjoyment of God. So when leaders depart from the Word of God or begin to contradict the character of God – intentionally or not - they are obscuring God’s beauty before the people.

And that's a problem.

Moses had to learn this the hard way, do you remember that? Flip forward in your Bibles to Numbers 11:11-12. The people were in the desert here, they were tired and exhausted - it had been days since they'd had any water and so God told Moses to SPEAK to the rock and it would give forth water for the people to drink.

But Moses was irritated.

He was sick and tired of these people with their constant whining and complaining so like Nadab and Abihu he DEVIATED from the instructions that he'd been given. The Bible says:

And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.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 20:11–12 ESV)

Did you see that? He hit the rock instead of speaking to it. But what's the big deal? Water still came out! Yeah but the big deal was that doing it that way obscured what God was trying to say to the people about Jesus. God was crafting an illustration in advance – that's not a guess, the Apostle Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 10. He says: talked about this, he said these folks:

"For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, **and the Rock was Christ.**" (1 Corinthians 10:4 ESV)

Ok, well that's a problem! We don't want to be teaching people that Jesus is some sort of cosmic Pinyata!! That is 100% not the elementary principle here! God was trying to illustrate that when we are tired and weary in this life we can go to Jesus and PRAY and he will cause springs of living water to well up in our souls – but Moses kind of ruined that! He OBSCURED the ELEMENTARY principle – and he paid a terrible price for that.

The point here is that leaders are supposed to point to Jesus. Period. All leaders. The Apostle Paul says this to husbands. In Ephesians 5:25 he says:

“Husbands, love your wives, **as Christ loved the church**” (Ephesians 5:25 ESV)

Men, who you are as a husband should say something to your wife, to your children and to the watching world about the beauty and the gentleness of Jesus. Does it?

It’s the job of every leader to illustrate and commend the person and work of Christ.

That was the essence of Paul’s personal leadership philosophy; he said:

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1 NIV11)

“Don’t worship me”, Paul says, “but do learn to worship Christ by following me. That’s my job! My job is to point you to Jesus! My job is to get you established – get you going - on the way of Christ!”

That’s leadership!

Whether you are a parent, a pastor an elder – doesn’t matter – LEADERSHIP in the covenant community is about communicating and commending Christ!!

We’re pointers, we’re bumper rails, in the worst-case scenario we’re cattle prods - but the focus, the object, the object the GOAL is always the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

He’s the story, he’s the point.

He’s the one who came for us. He’s the one who lived for us. He’s the one who died for us. He’s the one who ROSE FOR US and ASCENDED FOR US and who ever lives before the Father to make intercession FOR US. He’s the Master, he’s the Teacher, he’s the Savior – thanks be to God! Let’s pray together.