

LEVITICUS 10:1-3

MEN WHOM GOD KILLED!

ANYONE CAN SERVE! CAN'T THEY?

“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. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. 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.”¹

Scripture warns believers, “[Divine judgements against God’s people] took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:6]. Again, the Word of God reminds followers of the Christ, “These things [judgements against the community of faith] happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:11]. We ignore the accounts of those who preceded us in the worship of the Living God at our own peril. Even the presumptuous sin of professed worshippers can be instructive for the people of God.

Many people imagine the church of the Living God to be a democracy. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The attitude, prevalent among a surprising number of the churches of our Lord, is not new. The idea that the congregation of the faithful shows itself from earliest days to be a democracy, the idea that pastors, or even deacons, can be elected without giving thought to God’s work in the lives of individuals, inevitably leads to disaster. Worse still are individuals who presume against God and against His people, promoting themselves into positions of leadership, who are then allowed to occupy those positions through the silence of the people. Whenever a congregation forgets, or worse still, ignores the fact, that God appoints whom He wills to oversee the work of His people, it leads inevitably to disaster.

Nadab and Abihu are the names of brothers that shall live in infamy for all the days of mankind on the earth. Born to great privilege as servants of the Living God, they reached for more, leading to death. Though He is patient, God does not play games with rebels. Let the people of God hear the Word of the Living God and take heed.

SEEDS OF REBELLION — Rebellion doesn’t just happen. Long before the rebel’s acts, the plot was formulated in the heart. People do not just “fall into” sin; the heart is disposed to sin before ever the individual sins. A willingness to sin always precedes the sinful act. Let me explain what I mean by looking at three areas of concern.

Sin in the individual is the area I will first consider. We are born in sin, according to the Word [see PSALM 51:5]. We go astray from our youth as the “self” demands first place. Children must be trained to think of others, learning to treat their fellow beings with respect. Even as children, we know there is a God, but we seldom know our responsibilities toward God unless we are instructed. This is a vital reason why parents must train their children in foundational truth as presented in the Word of God. There is a need for instruction in righteousness as parents take their children to the House of God rather than merely sending their children to church.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

LEVITICUS 10:1-3
ANYONE CAN SERVE... CAN'T THEY?

Sinful acts originate in the mind. I mean that people are open to allowing the particular sin before that sin is committed. Though the context does not precisely fit the issue at hand, the truth is nonetheless revealed when the wise man writes: “As he thinks within himself, so he is” [PROVERBS 23:7 NASV]. Think about that for a moment.

On one occasion, the Master was challenged by the Pharisees because they claimed that Jesus’ disciples were defiled because they failed to wash their hands before eating. As was often the case, Jesus seized the opportunity to instruct those who were following Him. “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” [MARK 7:20-23]. That is a dreadful, a frightful catalogue of evil actions; and Jesus said they begin in the heart!

Though the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick [see JEREMIAH 17:9], it is only as one surrenders to the temptation to dwell on these things that the wicked acts are performed. Make no mistake, lurking in the dark shadows of the mind are horrible sins that will be expressed if you feed on them. Though you guard the front door to your heart, resisting the wicked one and refusing to succumb to evil, make no mistake, there is a backdoor to your heart. And Satan knows precisely how to enter through the backdoor. Tragically, while we are celebrating victory because we repelled a frontal assault, the enemy is storming the unguarded backdoor to gain entrance into our lives.

Do you know why a child is disobedient and disrespectful to a parent? It is because the child has nurtured bitterness and hatred, exalting herself above the parent because she imagines that her experience is superior to that of her mother. Moreover, this sense of superiority is fostered by modern educators who tell the child that she alone is able to determine how to conduct her life. If that child will be spared heartache and continual sorrow, the parent must take control and put down her rebellion by refusing to permit the child to feed on imagined slights and on wrongs, real or fantasised.

The murderer must justify killing a person before ever the act is committed. One of the grave disservices we do to our youth is entertaining them with movies and television shows that glorify violence, as though death should be the first option whenever a problem arises. We inoculate them against being repelled at gratuitous violence and marvel that they resort to anger as a first response to any challenge. We need to instruct our youth, to say nothing of teaching ourselves, that not every insult merits a strong response. As Marines, we were trained that it is not necessary to shed blood on every hill. That is a good policy for each person.

The thief will justify the act of stealing from another long before actually robbing another. Once the action is justified in an individual’s mind, theft doesn’t seem all that terrible. However, the commandment still stands: “You shall not steal” [EXODUS 20:15].

The unfaithful wife will not simply awaken one day and determine that she will violate her marriage vows. Long before the temptation arises, she will have been engaged in mental adultery, longing for a more romantic man, thinking of how thrilling it would be to be pursued by a handsome man, toying with infidelity in her mind. Then, when the opportunity arises she will find it easy to break the vows she made before God. The woman flirting with justifying immorality, the man toying with pornography, must be warned to heed the words that teach us, “All that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires” [1 JOHN 2:16, 17a].

LEVITICUS 10:1-3
ANYONE CAN SERVE... CAN'T THEY?

Before ever an individual despises God in his heart, he must exalt himself. Filled with pride and believing the hype that he is the centre of his universe, he refuses to acknowledge God or worship Him as God. During the days of the Great Tribulation, after the saints are removed from the earth, people will be largely worshippers of “self.” Even as God pours out awesome judgements on the earth, we read that most people will not “repent and give [God] glory” [REVELATION 16:9b].

Sin in society arises through lethargy and through a failure to restrain evil. Just as sin expressed by individuals is first harboured in the heart, so sin in society is first tolerated, then fostered and at last embraced. As an example of such progression of wickedness, think of the business of abortion, the holocaust that consumes the youth of our world. In the United States, sixty million infants have been slaughtered—torn to pieces, burned with caustic solutions, had their brains pierced with forceps, been murdered with drugs—since seven black-robed tyrants determined that such slaughter was the prerogative of women.

In the forty-four years since “Roe v. Wade”, eleven times as many infants have been killed compared to the six million Jews murdered by the evil Nazi regime. Worldwide, an estimated fifty-six million infants are slaughtered *in utero* each year. Our world is horrified at the slaughter taking place daily in Aleppo, just as it was horrified at the pictures of six million Jewish men, women and children shot, gassed and poisoned. However, just because the slaughter of the innocent takes place in a sterile environment as the protected space in which the unborn child floats is suddenly invaded by needles and knives, it is no less horrific!

Some within society had to first determine that they did not care to protect the vulnerable and the weak; all that mattered was their own perverted desires. When the Supreme Court of the United States rendered its ruthless decision, people quietly accepted what was said. After all, they didn't have to kill the child; and just as good Germans chose to be blind to the holocaust taking place in their own nation, so good Americans chose to be blind to the holocaust taking place in their nation. Canadians, likewise, chose to be silent, permitting the same slaughter to be carried out in this nation because judicial tyrants determined that the unborn had no right to life.

Shame on us! We cannot say that we are ignorant of what is going on. If you vote for a politician that approves of this slaughter, you share in the shame of what is taking place. If you are silent when others approve of this cowardly act of murder of the most vulnerable, you are party to the holocaust. It was precisely the *laissez-faire* attitude of Christendom that permitted the metastasis of this particular evil throughout contemporary society.

Let me speak of another example of how sin in society has insinuated itself into society. There was a day when foul, crude, coarse language shocked people; such language was shocking precisely because it was seldom heard. But, then, that was in an era when people growing to adulthood still had a vibrant vocabulary and could express themselves forcefully when necessary with powerful words. Then, youth began to imbibe deeply of wells contaminated by socialism. The primary source of this polluted language was the higher education community. The Free Speech Movement of the sixties was viewed with amusement and the filth that began pouring from the lips of educators and their mentees was seen as a passing fad, except it wasn't.

Today, we witness a populace that is incapable of communicating or employing the power of our English tongue and a populace unable to think deeply enough to move society upward. Instead, filth has invaded our language until even the faithful are as likely to speak the language of Ashdod as to speak the language of Judah. We are no longer surprised when brother Christians and when sister Christians can no longer be distinguished from the people of this fallen world by their speech. And too many see this as an example of progress in the Faith!

Sin in the community of faith results from the failure to instruct the saints in righteousness. Sinful individuals arise when those individuals feed on the evil that is resident in the human heart. Sinful societies arise when the people become tolerant of wickedness. This is especially true when the people of God fail to speak out against evil, when the communities of Faith cease to oppose wickedness or do so only in a perfunctory and spasmodic fashion. This refocuses attention on the ultimate source of sin, which is when the community of Faith fails to instruct the people in righteousness.

Churches tend to move away from the tenets of God as time passes. The cycle of the faithful has been described as spiritually enslaved people crying out to God for deliverance. Their pleas lead to God intervening by sending revival. Revival leads to aggressive evangelism and proclamation of the truths of God. With time, the fervour wanes and the people grow complacent as the faithful drift into senescence. At last, senescence degenerates into spiritual slavery. If the True and Living God does not intervene to send revival, the Faith in that once vibrant community will be extinguished.

Let me speak pointedly of my observations—observations made from the fringes of the Faith. I am no longer situated in the middle of Christendom; rather, I occupy a small niche on the edge of Christian culture. From this vantage, I see a people who have grown complacent, a people who are settled on their lees, a people who are at ease in Zion. We Christians appear to imagine that lifting our hands and singing emotional love songs constitutes worship. We forget those times of refreshing that attend God's presence with His people. We yearn for the awe and wonder we once experienced at the thought that God sent His Son to die because of our weakness, and despite our best efforts we are unable to recapture what is missing. Nevertheless, we perform the routines of reciting prayers, of generating faux fire as we sing emotion-laden songs and as we tolerate religious speeches filled with pious sentiments that do little to transform our hearts weighed down with the cares of the day.

Ornate church buildings are erected and filled with gaudy carpets and cushy pews so that we can be comfortable as we perform what we call "worship." Christians boast about the growing number of megachurches dotting the landscape and we listen to the polished sermons of religious spokesmen on a daily basis. We listen to radio stations dedicated to providing "Christian" music so we won't be forced to listen to the music of this dying world; and the services of stars of the church world are brought into our living rooms each day. However, I note that the Christian music we hear is so similar to that provided by the world as to be almost indistinguishable and the sermons we enjoy seldom disturb us but are designed to make us feel good about ourselves. Little is done to prepare the professed saints of God for spiritual warfare; but we can certainly hum the tunes to catchy worship songs.

Many years ago, a Baptist divine lamented, "It is greatly to be feared that much of the preaching of modern times has lost its depth and power. The plough does not run deep enough. There is no deep conviction of sin. There is no mourning for sin such as we find set forth in Zechariah 13. We find our way to a modern profession of religion, dry-eyed. There is no weeping in it. And hence, feeling ourselves to be but little sinners, we need only a little Saviour."² What was observed in that distant day is well-nigh universal among the churches in this day. We need revival; and we do not even recognise our dreadful deficit.

² B. H. Carroll, **An Interpretation of the English Bible: James, Thessalonians, Corinthians, Volume 13** (Ages Software, © 2002) 42

REBELLION — “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.” In our text, we meet two brothers who were blessed and blind. These brothers were blessed because of the position to which God had elevated them. They were blind because they exalted their own experience and desires over the will of God.

Nadab and Abihu were the first two sons born to Aaron and Elisheba [see **EXODUS 6:23**]. As Aaron’s sons, they were divinely appointed to serve as priests of God. “Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar” [**EXODUS 28:1**]. In fact, Nadab was next in line to serve as High Priest, and his brother Abihu would be in line behind him. These boys were highly privileged; but the divine blessing appears not to have been enough to satisfy their desire for more.

This knowledge brings up a point that prevails among the people of God to this day. Though often neglected, or even ignored, those who direct the spiritual affairs of the people of God are to be appointed, not elected. The congregation of the faithful is not a democracy; we do not elect our elders—they are appointed and the congregation accepts whom God appoints. Neither is the congregation of the faithful a hierarchy composed of princes and regents; the Church of the Living God is a living Body with Christ as the Head and those whom He appoints directing His work.

The shepherd of the congregation is appointed to particular duties. He is to nourish the flock with strong meat and with milk for the wee bairns. He is to lead the flock, guiding them along paths of righteousness to verdant pastures and refreshing water. He is to protect the flock, defending them from assault and from injury. He is to wound the recalcitrant and bind up the wounded. He is to present the full Gospel of Christ the Lord, building the people in this Holy Faith, always pleading for them before the Master and ensuring that He keeps the words of the Master before the people. His work is impossible to perform, except for the energy and power supplied by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, though training is essential and though education is valuable, no amount of education can prepare the man of God for the tasks he shall assume. Pastors are appointed, not elected.

So, Nadab and Abihu were appointed to divine positions. Neither of these two was the chief priest, however; they were appointed to assist their father and to serve the people in the Lord’s stead. God had honoured them, appointing them to positions of responsibility from which they would serve the people and glorify the LORD God. These men rebelled against God! They rebelled against God and asserted themselves against their own father. It was the height of arrogance. It was the challenge which God could not ignore.

When God gave instruction concerning the Altar of Incense, He specified how it was to be built. He gave precise dimensions and instructions of how it was to be adorned. Then, God said, “Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations.” Then, God warned in clarion tones, “You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it.” The precision was required for one great reason, explained in the final verse. “Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. *It is most holy to the LORD*” [**EXODUS 30:7-10**].

LEVITICUS 10:1-3
ANYONE CAN SERVE... CAN'T THEY?

The High Priest alone was appointed to offer incense on this altar because it was “most holy to the LORD.” If any other attempted to offer incense or make an offering on this altar, it would be a direct challenge to the Living God. When Nadab and Abihu approached the altar, they were attempting to offer a sacrifice which God would not accept because they were in defiance of the True and Living God. Thus, the text informs us that “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” [**LEVITICUS 10:1**].

Multiple ideas have been advanced to state what these two men did that was so terrible. It is perhaps foolish to speculate about what they did since the text informs us that they performed an act “which [the LORD] had not commanded them.” That is the end of the matter for all who accept the Bible as the Word of God. These brothers approached the altar of the LORD, an altar declared to be “most holy to the LORD.” Moreover, they approached the altar in an aberrant manner that was not according to what God had commanded. This is the point I urge you to see: *the brothers were deliberately disobedient*.

They exalted self-will above the will of God. These men acted on their own authority—they didn’t consult with Moses or with their father, Aaron. Neither did they consult the LORD before they attempted to appear before Him. Given the information provided in the text, we must conclude that they were not seeking God’s glory—they were seeking to exalt themselves. They assumed that worship of the Living God could be reduced to an act rather than a shared meeting in which He is glorified and man is humbled.

I remind you that worship is not about how we feel; worship is about Who we meet. Close your eyes, sway to the throb of the music, repeatedly sing the chorus ever so softly—yet, if you fail to meet the Risen Son of God, you have not worshipped. The man who presumes to lead the congregation of the faithful can neither compel God to meet the assembly nor lift them into His presence. Each person must receive the Son of God as He reveals Himself to the worshipper; and the shepherd can but faithfully fulfil the duties to which he is assigned.

There is an aspect of this dramatic account that amplifies the horror of what these brothers did. Moses had just consecrated Aaron and his four sons. He had then assembled the entire congregation and explained what was to be done. Aaron and his sons were consecrated, set apart to this holy service [see **LEVITICUS 8:1-36**]. Remember, Nadab and Abihu participated in this service of setting apart as holy to the LORD.

On the eighth day, Aaron and his sons, together with the elders of Israel, were called into the presence of the LORD. God commanded Aaron to prepare sacrifices—a sin offering, a burnt offering, peace offerings and a grain offering mixed with oil. Aaron did all that God commanded and his sons participated with him. Now note the verses that are recorded immediately before the text. “Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he came down from offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces” [**LEVITICUS 9:22-24**].

Fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar. Almost immediately, perhaps the next day, the two brothers each took his own censer—not the censer that was consecrated to bring coals [see **EXODUS 40:9**], approached the altar and attempted to offer what was not commanded. Again, fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them! God was declaring His glory and His holiness.

LEVITICUS 10:1-3
ANYONE CAN SERVE... CAN'T THEY?

God had commanded that He was to be approached in a particular way. Shortly after this incident, he would amplify His instructions. “The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died, and the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place...’” [LEVITICUS 16:1-3a].

Then, God went into great detail as He spoke of the sacrifice, the lot for Azazel, the offering itself, making atonement, even how the priest was to dress and how the priest was to cleanse himself after making the sacrifice. God even made provision for the continuation of this sacrifice after Aaron had died [see LEVITICUS 16:3b-34]. There should have been no question that one did not come into the presence of the Living God in a casual manner. However, it happened. Now, God would ensure that there was no excuse for failure to treat Him as holy.

Throughout the years of my service before the Lord, I have observed some incredible acts of defiance. Sometimes, those acts resulted immediately in divine judgement. I have no particular insight into what God is doing; however, when people act defiantly and God says, “Enough!” it doesn’t require a prophet to understand what happened. To be certain, I have seen men, and women, insert themselves into positions of leadership and treat the Bride of Christ as their private fiefdom. Gracious though He is, in due time, I have witnessed God remove such individuals from this life. Rather than permit His Holy Name to be defiled or to permit His Holy Bride to be debased, He will act to remove the threat His Name and His people.

I have witnessed even greater defiance exhibited by churches that treat the ministry as a commodity to be bartered away. Deacons presume to take charge because the church needs to be run like a business. However, the congregation of the faithful is not a business; and attempting to reduce it to a business ensures the death of the assembly.

At other times, I have witnessed a cabal of power brokers who want to control who is allowed to join the assembly, excluding those who are of the wrong social status or perhaps who are the wrong race. Such efforts have always culminated in the death of that assembly. Though God gives time to repent, when a church doesn’t repent, God will say, “Enough!”

You may recall a message I presented about a year ago; the message was entitled, “The Danger of Seeing God.”³ In that message, I noted that Nadab and Abihu *rationalised that they had a right to divine access*. This was a serious misjudgement on their part. These two men presumed against God, forgetting that past blessings do not exempt us from present obedience. I suspect that many among the people of God must be reminded of this truth. I know that we who preach the message of grace must be reminded frequently that we cannot live on past blessing. The temptation is ever present for the minister of Christ to live in the past rather than living in the present and living in anticipation of what is yet to come. We are invited into the presence of the Lord our God on the merits of Christ the Lord and not on our own merits.

In that message, I also noted that these two brothers *exalted the act over the attitude*. These men who had received such high honour from the Lord, assumed that the act of worship was more important than actually worshipping! They imagined that what they did was of greater importance than who they met in worship. In this, they are not so different from many Christians today. Many professed people of God imagine that ritual is sufficient to honour God. However, it is the attitude of the worshipper that God examines and not the act.

³ Michael Stark, “The Danger of Seeing God,” sermon, preached March 20, 2016, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Exodus-24.09-11-Leviticus-10.01-11-The-Danger-of-Seeing-God.pdf>

LEVITICUS 10:1-3
ANYONE CAN SERVE... CAN'T THEY?

Finally, *these brothers sought to manipulate instead of magnify the LORD*. God is not a commodity to be bartered or a genie to be employed to our own benefit. God is not impotent just because we have entered into His presence. He is not some sort of a cosmic bellhop that is compelled to do our bidding because we know the magic language. He is God and we are to do as He commands.

Above all else, these brothers forgot that *God is holy*. Remember the words Peter wrote, “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” [1 PETER 1:15, 16]. Many called by the Name of Christ in this day appear to have forgotten this same truth. Worship of the Risen Saviour is occasional rather than regular. His Word is treated as optional, prayer is regarded as a talisman and the manner in which we live is thought to be of no concern to the One who was crucified because of our sinful condition. Such attitudes reveal distressing casualness that defies the Lord our God. Consequently, when these attitudes have become common among the professed people of God, should we be surprised that many treat the holy Bride of Christ as a tawdry trollop to be used at our convenience rather than recognised as the precious entity for whom He sacrificed Himself?

REBELLION JUDGED — “And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. 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.” What could Aaron say? His sons had violated the command of the LORD; and they had done so deliberately.

This is the truly terrifying part of the message today. God is holy. We must not presume against the Living God; we must not act defiantly. David prayed,

“Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.”

[PSALM 19:13]

This prayer was offered in light of the divine warning issued through Moses. “The person who acts defiantly, whether native-born or a resident foreigner, insults the LORD. That person must be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken his commandment, that person must be completely cut off. His iniquity will be on him” [NUMBERS 15:30, 31 NET BIBLE].

The Psalmist was correct when he assessed the Lord’s character. David wrote:

“The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

[PSALM 103:8]

We Christians have enjoyed God’s mercy and grace for such a long time that when He does judge, we are shocked; we cannot believe that God will judge. Too often, we have become practical atheists, professing with our mouth that God is holy and righteous even while living as though He is removed from all interaction with His people. However, we forget that though God is merciful, our God is holy.

LEVITICUS 10:1-3
ANYONE CAN SERVE... CAN'T THEY?

Nahum observed these twin attributes of God's character when he wrote:

“The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.”

[NAHUM 1:3]

To be certain, God is powerful, displaying His might on our behalf; but the verse implies that His power is not to be trifled with, for He can unleash His power to hold the sinner to account. Christians must not imagine that they can manipulate the Living God.

I must be careful not to depreciate the grace and the mercy of God, but we must always remember that His grace and mercy have meaning only against the awesome purity that defines His person. God is holy, and He calls us to holiness. Recall that the Apostle Paul has written, “God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:7].

The writer of the Letter to Hebrew Christians has admonished all who read that missive, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” [HEBREWS 12:14]. That same writer also appends an admonition that must be embraced in this day. He writes, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is ... unholy like Esau” [HEBREWS 12:15, 16a].

God is holy, and He calls us in holiness. We read in the Ephesian encyclical, “Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. For he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we may be holy and unblemished in his sight in love” [EPHESIANS 1:3, 4]. Therefore, we who are redeemed now appear as holy before the Father. We are confident that we shall be made holy at the return of the Master. However, we must strive for His holiness in this life. To fail to do so is to invite divine discipline.

It is an axiom of the Faith that with great privilege comes great responsibility. Not only are those who lead the people of God to teach the people the difference between the holy and the unholy; they must also practise this in their own lives. Promotion of the self and seeking approval of the congregation are reasons unworthy of the individual who would lead God's people. While pronouncing judgement against Sidon, Ezekiel reveals the truth demonstrated through this incident in the camp of the LORD.

“Behold, I am against you, O Sidon,
and I will manifest my glory in your midst.
And they shall know that I am the LORD
when I execute judgments in her
and manifest my holiness in her.”

[EZEKIEL 28:22]

Once before, God's holiness had been revealed, and the people shouted and worshipped. Now, the LORD's holiness was revealed, and Aaron held his peace. The concept is that Aaron was terrified, he was “rooted to the spot.”⁴ Filled with dread at this display of holiness, Aaron was motionless, unable to move. The same concept is used of the nations in God's presence:

⁴ John D. Currid, **A Study Commentary on Leviticus, EP Study Commentary** (Evangelical Press, Darlington, England, Webster, New York 2004) 126

LEVITICUS 10:1-3
ANYONE CAN SERVE... CAN'T THEY?

“Terror and dread fall upon them;
because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone.”

[EXODUS 15:16]

Permit me to take one moment longer to point out the truth that we must not ignore. Nadab and Abihu had a great privilege—they were behind only Moses and Aaron in their position of leadership. The serious nature of their sin is magnified by their position. They had witnessed God’s glory at Mount Sinai when they were counted among an elite group of leaders called into the presence of the LORD God [see EXODUS 24:1, 9-11]. God takes up residency among His people and lights the altar fire [see LEVITICUS 9:23, 24], and almost immediately these sons of Aaron violate the command of God. It is a pattern witnessed throughout the Word of God.

Adam and Eve exalted their will against God’s will soon after they received a perfect world with ideal relationships with one another and with God. God established His covenant with Noah only to see the old man get drunk and be compelled to curse his son. God presented the Ten Words to Moses, and even before he comes down from the mountain the people have crafted a golden calf and degenerated into gross idolatry. The disciples of Christ celebrate the Last Supper and almost immediately after abandon the Master. It is a warning to those who think to provide leadership among the people of God—God is holy; we must not imagine that our thoughts are superior to His revealed will. When Nadab and Abihu disqualified themselves to serve as priests of God, He removed them from office by “firing” them.

Quite obviously, I speak to those who serve the congregation of the Lord. Whether as a pastor or as a deacon, we must not imagine that we can ignore the Lord’s holiness. Not only are we responsible to instruct the people of God in righteousness, we are responsible to live holy, godly lives.

Let the message serve to warn each Christian to live holy, righteous lives before the eyes of the watching world. Outsiders seek every opportunity to dismiss the message of salvation; failure to reveal the Lord as holy through living righteous lives provides occasion for the lost to dismiss our appeals for life. Our children reject the Faith and refuse to follow us in coming to the Lord because we fail to honour the Lord as holy. Our colleagues reject our appeals because they see no difference between us and the world of death in which they live. Let the message serve to impel each Christian to strive for holiness. Amen.