

AUGUST 28th
APPROACHING GOD'S THRONE RIGHTLY

"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."

LEVITICUS 10:1-3

We live in a world that cries out for justice and fairness. When people wound us, we naturally cry out for justice to be served. However, as we interact with people, we also want fairness. It's the age-old mantra of any child (and any adult) ... "That's not fair!" Indeed, as we examine this sudden death of some of Aaron's sons, it doesn't quite seem fair (if we're honest enough to admit that we think this way). Was death required? Could God not have simply disciplined them in another way? Of course, we are in no place to judge God's dealings here. However, God does have much to teach us here.

God is clear here that Nadab and Abihu offered "unauthorized" or "strange" fire before the Lord. We don't know why they offered the fire this way. We only know that they did it. Kenneth Mathews offers key insight for what their sin problem was: "Although Nadab and Abihu were divinely ordained laborers in the Lord's work, they met with immediate death because of their mistreatment of holy things. Since the incense was part of tabernacle worship, it was holy to the Lord. The fire for the same reason had to come from the anointed altar in the central courtyard, where the Lord first ignited the fires of worship...Our passage characterizes the fire presented by Nadab and Abihu as "unauthorized," meaning that it did not come from the source sanctioned by God." Even as the details are not completely known, we can see God's rationale for why he disciplined the men: "Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified." These men were set apart as priests and were held to a high standard, and God will not compromise His glory. Kent Hughes makes a key observation from the command to slaughter the Canaanites in Joshua, "God's glory is greater than human life." This statement can seem appalling at first glance, but this is exactly what God is teaching here for worshipers in Leviticus. God will not be made smaller and palatable by His creation. He remains separate even as He is near. God will not compromise His glory before His people. This is the reason why these men died.

Men, this story is shocking to us as we read it. Even so, we can think that this example shows that the God of the Old Testament acts differently than the God of the New Testament. However, look again. Here in Leviticus God's people have just arrived at Sinai Mountain to be God's people. In the New Testament, God had just begun His Church and people also died suddenly...Ananias and Sapphira. God makes a point in both. His glory will not be compromised. Even as He comes near, He also remains holy and distinct from His people. This is what makes the cross of Jesus so significant. Wouldn't we all be dead without the mercy and grace of God? Fairness would mean death and eternal separation from God because we have all sinned in Adam (Romans 5:12). But God. God gives a Substitute where He can be the just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus. God's holiness hasn't been changed, but our experience of it has since the Older Testament. Now we have been credited with the perfect righteousness of Christ. The Father looks at us and sees Christ. We are no longer objects of God's wrath, but instead we are called sons. Praise God for His glorious grace and mercy!

Spend some time thinking about how this event shows God's glory. Ask God to give you a greater awareness of His holiness today.

Further Reading: Acts 5:1-11

