



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Leviticus 10:1 – 11

“The Strange Fire of Nadab and Abihu”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we are thankful to Thee for another opportunity to look into the inspired word. And we thank Thee for the Old Testament Scriptures and the wonderful illustrations of events that provide us with so much instruction in our day. And we thank Thee for the incident to which we are coming and we pray that its lessons may strike home to us in a very important and useful way. Enable us, Lord, to understand and also to apply, we realize that it is not enough simply to know the words of Holy Scripture we do need to be taught by the Holy Spirit the truths that lie back of these words and the applications of them to the life that Thou has called us to live both in the church, in our homes, in our individual lives, and in our life in our community. So, Lord, help us to understand tonight and may the Book of Leviticus be especially useful to us in our lives.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We're turning to Leviticus chapter 10, and looking at this very unusual incident in which Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took and offered strange fire before the Lord. Let me read beginning with the 1st verse of the 10th chapter through the 11th verse, and this will form the subject of the exposition for tonight.

“Now 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. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then 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.’”

He’s citing from Holy Scripture and using the Old Testament to make application to this particular incident and then that last sentence of verse 3, is very interesting.

“So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.”

The death of the two sons of Aaron he recognized to be a divine judgment. It’s evident and I must say that a father who loses two sons must have been very distraught but the Scriptures say simply, “So Aaron, therefore, kept silent.”

“Moses 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.’ So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moses had said. Then 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. You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, lest you die; for the Lord’s anointing oil is upon you.’ So they did according to the word of Moses. The Lord then spoke to Aaron saying, ‘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 may not die, it is a

perpetual statute throughout your generations, and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean, and so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.”

The subject of this 10th chapter is the priesthood and its worship. Now, we all know the struggles of the soul that is seeking to find peace with God. And the thing that we learn through the struggles of our soul for forgiveness of sins and for right relationship with the Lord is that there is a way that seemeth right unto a man to a man but the end thereof is the way of death. And, finally, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit we are brought to realize that it is not the strugglings of our souls in good works that brings us eternal life, but it is the grace of God through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus. In other words, we learn that Christ is our substitute that he is the one who is offered the sacrifice by which we have salvation and through him we in grace receive the gift of eternal life.

Now, we are talking about something different when we come to Leviticus chapter 10, for here we are talking about the struggles of worship. There is a proper time, there is a proper motive, and there is a proper content in worship. Worship may be spurious, just as our attempts to justify ourselves may be spurious before God and unacceptable to him, joining the church, doing good works, praying through all of the other things that men try to do to merit eternal life. So in the worship of God there's a proper way to worship God as well. There's a proper subject. There's a proper object. There's a proper spirit in which we are to worship God. So what we have here is a chapter that has to do with the way man worships God. The truth is as C.H.M. has said, “Man spoils everything.” That's what he says after discussing events from Eden to the last rebellion of man in the Book of Genesis chapter 20; give man position, give him dignity, give him privileges, and he will prove ungrateful and corrupt them because he is man and his dignity is no dignity at all before the presence of God.

Now, the Lord has just confirmed and sanctified the service of Aaron and his sons by miracle. We did not study the 9th chapter. We looked at the 8th chapter in which we have the consecration of the priests, but in the 9th chapter a number of sacrifices are offered, which are means by which in the ritual Aaron and his sons are consecrated as priests.

Now, if you read through this 9th chapter there is a characteristic expression. Let me just read a couple of them. I noticed particularly two of them in verse 10 and verse 21. We read, “The fat and the kidneys and the lobe of the liver of the sin offering, he then offered up in smoke on the altar.” Now notice these last words, “Just as the Lord had commanded Moses.” Now, look at verse 21, “But the breasts and the right thigh Aaron presented as a wave offering before the Lord, just as Moses commanded.” So characteristic of the 9th chapter is the obedience of the children of Israel in carrying out the prescriptions that Moses had given them in the name of the Lord. So as a result of their obedience in these sacrifices by which the priests were inducted in their office, we read in verse 23 of chapter 9, “And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting.

When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.” So the Lord confirms and sanctifies the service of Aaron and his sons in the priesthood by this miracle of his presence and of the resulted fire which came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar. This altar came from heaven and the fire on that altar was a fire that Israel was to keep burning thereafter. That’s an important thing to remember in the types of the Book of Leviticus that the altar, which was an altar where the animals were sacrificed and burned, had fire upon it and that fire was tended to morning and night but it was started by God who from heaven caused the fire to burn.

Now, in the 11th chapter the characteristic thing that you note is disobedience. Look at how the 1st verse opens, “Now 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.” So in chapter 9, we have characteristic, perhaps we should say, for man uncharacteristically obedience but in chapter 11 we have disobedience. Now, an act is committed which he has not commanded them. And so instead of having the manifestation of the glory of God in his presence and in the fire and the resulted praise of men because of what God had done, we have the manifestation of God in judgment.

Well let’s turn now to the first three verses where Aaron’s eldest sons, these were the two sons that were his oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, offer strange fire before the Lord. Our first question I’m sure that in reading we would ask ourselves is, why was this fire strange fire? What does it mean when it says it is strange fire? Commentators almost universally say that the fire is strange because it was not taken from the brazen altar; that, evidently, Nadab and Abihu had fired this incense from their own source rather than from the source at the brazen altar. Perhaps that is true. Perhaps by inference we are to assume that.

We do not, however, have any statement of that in this chapter and, furthermore, we do not have any statement in the Book of Leviticus or Exodus that the fire was to come from the altar. Later on in Leviticus chapter 16, in the Day of Atonement, and we’ll spend two nights on the Day of Atonement, reference is made to the fact that the fire that is to burn the incense is to be taken specifically off of the altar. So it’s perhaps possible we should infer that they did know maybe by oral statements not recorded in the word of God that they were to take fire only off of the brazen altar. So far as the account is concerned it was a case of impatience. They acted before they had specific instructions concerning the fire on the altar.

Now, I do think that it is likely, but we cannot be absolutely certain, that the fire then is strange because it was a fire of their own making, but there is also another reason why it is strange fire. It is a fire that is offered not in the prescribed manner. It was offered at the wrong time.

Now, I don't have time to go into the details of the discussion of the temporal aspects of chapters 9 and 10, but let me simply say this that it is, it seems to me, clear that chapter 9 and chapter 10 are related together just as chapter 8 and that certain sacrifices are set forth in chapter 9 and the resultant communion over the eating of the pieces of the animal sacrifice has not yet taken place. So we have sacrifices that have been made but the communion meals have not yet been eaten and reference in chapter 10 is made to the communion meals. So the offering of the incense does not occur in the early morning or at the evening as it was supposed to. So it was incense that was offered at the wrong time. It is, therefore, I think to sum it up, what we are saying then is that the reason the fire is strange is because it was probably fire that was not taken from the brazen altar and the offering of the incense and the fire was made at the wrong time. It was intended perhaps to accompany the praise of the people referred to in chapter 9, and so it was the offering of wrong matter at the wrong time.

Now, what is that in essence? Why it is an act of will-worship. It is an act in which they themselves do something that in their intention and their motivation arises from themselves arising out of their impatience they plunge into the prescribed worship of God and seek to carry it out as they would want to carry it out. Now, that is a very serious thing. Worship is prescribed by God just as certainly as the plan of salvation is prescribed by God. We have in the New Testament very definite statements made concerning the plan of salvation. Any other attempt to be saved in another way is like a thief going up some other way. The Lord Jesus says in John chapter 10, “Likewise in the worship of an individual,” there are instructions in the word of God concerning worship and just as we may have a false plan of salvation we may actually have false ideas

concerning worship, false methods of worship. The judgment is described in verse 2, “And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.”

I'm very glad I was not there because fire, evidently, from the Shekhinah glory in the holiest of all shot out from above the mercy seat through the holy place in which were contained the table of shew bread and the candlestick and the golden altar of incense out through the second veil out to the altar, for these men were standing out in the court of the tabernacle, and like a flash of lightening their lives were taken away. In fact, it was so much like lightening that statement is made that they were carried off and their tunics or their clothes have not been affected. So fire shot out from the mercy seat through the holy place like a lightening flash and in the midst of the incense of these sinners it found them and destroyed them. I imagine that what that is or what that was is just a little anticipation and illustration of what its going to be like when the Lord Jesus comes at his second advent and overthrows all opposition to the throne of God. It will be just as easy for God to carry out his work of destruction.

Now, Moses interprets what happens to Aaron. He says, and I know that Aaron must have been shocked his two eldest sons, those who would have succeeded him in office, are now have been slain by the Lord, Moses turned to Aaron and said, “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.” It's a simple explanation of what happened. Priests are to sanctify him in office and in life. That is, they are to do all of their priestly activity in accordance with his word.

Now, when we are obedient as priests to the word of God we then sanctify him. Those who come near him are the priests and he says he will be treated as holy by those who come near him. These two men falsely came to him. They came to him contrary to the word of God. They in effect were rebellious against the statement that before all people I will be honored. Isn't it interesting that Aaron was silent in this? I think this is a

great testimony to Aaron because it's obvious that he recognized that what had happened was a divine judgment and being a divine judgment upon two men because of something that they had done to the office of priesthood, he saw that this was an official act of God.

I am reminded of Psalm 58 in verse 10, in which the psalmist in the midst of the prayer for the punishment of the wicked said, "The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." If you've ever wondered about some of these passages in the Bible in which we have these strong statements made by the biblical writers concerning the punishment of the wicked you have just a little bit of illustration of it, I think, right here.

Aaron no doubt within seething in with the loss of the two sons, nevertheless, recognizing his own official position as a representative of God, a priest of God with the people Israel, is absolutely silent in the presence of this judgment. We'll say something more about that later on but, "The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." There is a time when in spite of our personal feelings, we must give the reference to God that belongs to him because of high holiness

Now, the burial instructions follow in verses 4 through 7.

"Moses called also to Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel." If I pronounce these in a different way each time you'll understand why I'm sure. "And said to them, 'Come forward, carry your relatives away from the front of the sanctuary to the outside of the camp.' So they came forward and carried them still in their tunics."

Notice that statement still in their tunics. The fire had not touched their clothes but it had destroyed their lives. It was very much like, I understand like, a neutron bomb will do. It will kill people but it will not bother material things like buildings, and so the fire of God had slain the men but their clothes were untouched.

“Outside the camp as Moses had said. Then 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 may not become wrathful against all the congregation.’”

Now, isn't that interesting that he tells these two men not to uncover their heads or tear their clothes because if they do that they will die. What was it designed, what was expressed by the tearing of the clothes and the uncovering of the head? Well that was mourning. That was the custom of the east in mourning. You will see it, incidentally, today when things happen in Israel and on channel four or channel eight the next afternoon, we are taken to Tel Aviv or some of the cities of Jerusalem and when the time comes for the burial of those who have been slain by Israel's enemies, you'll notice these same practices of expressing grief. Clothes were torn in order that in a picture form you may see the heart that heaves with the sorrow of bereavement. The head is uncovered, but now Moses says to the priests do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes because if you do that you will die.

Why did he tell them that? Well, he told them that because if they did that it would signify in the outward sense to all of the people there about a dissatisfaction with what had happened. But after all this was the action of God was it not? So for the priests to express dissatisfaction with what God had done was to take the position of a sinner before God publicly. Priests are public people. That is they are representatives of the people. They are just like Adam represented men and Christ represents us, the redeemed. So the priests represented the people. We saw that in connection with the sin offering in which a sin committed by a priest means that the whole of the people is guilty. So specific instructions are given to the priest here that they are not to manifest any sign of grief because this was the act of God, and by their actions they were to express approval

even though inside their hearts they may have grieved over the loss of the brothers. Still they were to take the position of public men.

Incidentally, there is a lot of practical illustration here. You know often in a Christian church discipline has to be exercised various kinds. Now, when the elders exercised discipline on the local church it is the worst thing that a member can do to express sympathy with the individuals who are under discipline because if they express sympathy with those who are under discipline, in effect, they are taking the position of objecting to the discipline. One should be very careful and make the distinction in the New Testament when people are under discipline, public discipline, in the local church the members of the church are commanded not to eat with them. Now, if you disregard that and eat with them, you are, in effect, saying that as far as you're concerned the discipline was wrong. It's just a minor illustration of what we have right here and that's why Moses told them that they were not to express grief. It's a very serious thing because if they expressed grief then they came into conflict with what God had done and in their case he said they would die. So it was a serious matter.

You know, it's a matter of wisdom in the local church, incidentally, in a local church such as ours, when we have Sunday evening meetings in which men get up in the meeting and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit lead us in prayer or read the Scriptures or if they have spiritual gifts seek to instruct in the word. If they're not edifying one of the things that, I think, is not helpful at all, is for someone to go up and say to them well that was a fine message that you gave tonight we enjoyed hearing from you. You shouldn't do that. You shouldn't be courteous. That is just courteous. If in so doing you're not really being honest straightforward. So I like these sections in the word of God because they do instruct us in some very important things that have to do with the local church. Now, of course, when a brother gets up and he does give something that is worthwhile and helpful then you should encourage him. You should tell him that it was

a spiritual blessing and encourage him to exercise his gift but you should exercise discernment and be careful and honest in what you do.

Then in verse 8 through verse 11.

“The Lord spoke directly to Aaron and he said, ‘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 generation.’”

Now, this instruction that was given to Aaron is no doubt related to verse 1, and Nadab and Abihu and their offering of strange fire before the Lord, but there isn't any indication in this chapter that suggest that Nadab and Abihu did what they did because they were drunk. You might assume that if you read verse 9, in the light of what had preceded and did not think very deeply, you may have said, evidently, they were drunk. Perhaps that was the reason that they did what they did but since there is not anything stated above about their drunkenness, I think, the connection lies rather in the rashness of reaction. It was an action done impatiently. It was an action done rashly and we all know that we come under the influence of the spirits rather than the influence of the Spirit, we are inclined to do rash things. We're inclined to do things that we're sorry about the next morning.

Now, of course, sometimes we don't learn about them until the next morning and someone comes and says, “Do you know what you did last night when you had that third drink?” Well, life was life in those days as it is in this day, and the priests were warned that they were not to drink wine or strong drink because they might do rash things. Now, being public men, being representative men they were in an especially vulnerable position because what they did affected the whole of the congregation. So what they did deliberately might be done suddenly. That is what Nadab and Abihu did deliberately

might done suddenly under the influence of a drink or two of the spirits. So they're warned that they are not to drink wine or strong drink.

Been a great deal said about this in little comments in the commentaries. Some have said the fact that he told the priest not to drink wine or strong drink is an indication that others who weren't in that position could drink wine or strong drink. Well there's no need for us to engage in discussion over the point because the question is settled in other passages of Scripture. This has to do with primarily with the priests and they were instructed here not to drink wine or strong drink because they should have their minds clear when they are carrying out the Lord's work and that's expressed in the verses that follow. Notice verse 9, “and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean,” they had to make certain spiritual distinctions in the carrying out of their priestly activity and so his soul must be calm. It must be clear. It must be steady. It must not be drunk with the spirits. I think, incidentally, that indicates that in worship, worship is characteristically a function of the mind. It is not characteristically a function of the soul in the sense of the feelings or the emotions.

Now, I'm not saying that we should not have emotions. Someone said tonight as the meeting began, “If this message is a good enough message I may shout hallelujah.” And her husband said, “Well she probably will anyway but worship is not really, strictly speaking, an emotional thing primarily.” It is primarily a thing of the mind but we should have emotion, we are emotional persons, and so that which begins in the mind and the intellect should have its ultimate expression in the emotional. The thing that is wrong about the emotional is to make it primary to make it the predominant thing that moves a person as a person. It is the mind from which the thought about God comes and it is through the emotions and, ultimately, the body that the thoughts, the spiritual thoughts of the mind are expressed. I gather then that what is meant by this, by way of application is that we should be very careful in our worship not to have our worship proceed simply

from a desire to be enthusiastic. That is, our worship should not be simply enthusiastic. It should not be simply influenced by the fads and the flim flams and the frivolities and the fancies and the brainstorm of the modern church. We should rather look at what the word of God says. We should be very careful about preaching the gospel in drama by leaping from a Baptist straight to preach about Jonah or things like that. Primarily, our worship should proceed from the mind, from thoughts concerning the word of God. Music should never be music for music's sake but rather as the expression of spiritual truth. As for ballet, well I won't say anything about that. Paul says, "to be filled in the spirit."

Now, another reason why the priests were not to drink wine is expressed in verse 11, "And so as to teach the sons of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moses." It was the duty of the priest remember to instruct in the word of God, and if they were under the influence of the spirits they would not be very good instructors.

Well, let me conclude with a few comments of a practical nature. First of all, what was wrong with the offering that Nadab and Abihu make. Well, in the first place its time was wrong. I want to try to make, incidentally, a few applications to the modern church or to our local church or our church life in setting forth these things. The time was wrong. It was not the time for them to offer the incense which was early in the morning and late at night and, I gather, that this teaches us that there is a time for worship and that time for worship is the time of the Holy Spirit's instigation. You know in the New Testament in John chapter 4, verse 24, we read a word from the Lord Jesus concerning worship. We are told in that chapter John 4, and then in verse 24, God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The time for the worship of God is the time at which or in which the Lord leads us through the spirit to the worship of him.

Now, the second thing that characterized this particular offering and which was wrong about it was its motive. The motive of the offering of Nadab and Abihu was their own self-satisfaction. It was will worship. It was worship that arose out of their own wills. God rejects the fruit of fallen man's will. It's well to remember that. The fruits of man's corrupt will are not acceptable to God. He says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The thing that pleases God is that which is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit; the things that flow out of ourselves and totally and only of ourselves are displeasing to the Lord. He says, “They that are in the flesh cannot please God.” So when things arise from the flesh alone in worship toward God, they are wrong. They are unacceptable to him. They may be lovely in the sight of men. You may think why that's very creative but if it arises out of man's own will as its ultimate source, it is contrary to the will of God.

Let's just take some very, very practical and very well-known illustrations with which we are troubled today. Now, I tried to think of a better illustration of this but I could not. Let's just take for example the ordination of women. There's incidentally an article in this week's Time Magazine on this subject. Did you know that there are now ten thousand four hundred seventy ordained women? There's some interesting things about this according to the national council of churches. Of the ten thousand four hundred and seventy women they still only make up four percent, I believe, of the clergy in the United States. Clergy does not include me you understand because I'm not part of the clergy. That is, if I were making the list of members of the clergy. The women are located pretty much where they have always been -- nearly two thirds work in Pentecostal groups or paramilitary denominations like the Salvation Army, which has given women full standing for decades. One interesting feature of this is the fact that the women are congregating in the church groups that are least likely to need many new ordinands of either sex. In the Episcopal church, for example, women make up now eighteen point

four percent of students earning divinity degrees in the Episcopalian church. But the church doesn't need any new preachers at all, and the women are congregating there.

Now, I think, it is very plain in Scripture that the women should not be ordained. There is a ministry for women which is very full, very fruitful, very significant, just as important in the eyes of God as any ministry that any man has. We are inclined to think that a man who teaches the word of God, he's most important to the church. That's not true. In fact, in many of the works of God those who are most important in reality are those who don't say anything. You might hear a hallelujah from that. At any rate, we all know, we all know that importance is not measured by what you do but how you do what you are supposed to do.

Now, we don't question at all that women are important to the work of the Lord. We couldn't get along in Believers Chapel if we did not have the women that work here. I have the feeling myself that many of them are far more faithful than those of us who stand up in front of you and constantly teach the word. I really feel that. I'm not trying to give you some kind of exhibition of feigned humility. You know that that's far from me anyway. I really believe that. I think that we would not carry on our ministry were it not for the women who carry on so many of the activities of Believers Chapel. But when it comes to the question ordination for Christian ministry in the sense of spiritual gift of preaching and preaching to a congregation composed of mixed people, the Bible is expressed and plain on that point. Paul said, “I suffer not the women to teach or usurp authority over the men. Let the women keep silence in the churches.”

Now, when you have a church in which there is activity of women and they are speaking out in the church meeting, there is no way in which activity can be spiritual. It is a direct contradiction of the word of God. It is just as sad and just as condemned by the word of God as the activity of Nadab and Abihu who offered the strange fire before the Lord. There are congregations who say, “Well we believe that the Lord has led us to allow the women to speak.” That cannot be. God does not contradict himself. You have

the false idea of what spiritual guidance is if you say things like that, if you believe things like that. So when we come to the matter of Christian service, if the motive for our service arises out of our own corrupt will then you can be sure it is unacceptable to God.

Now, another thing someone was very kind this week. I don't know who did this but I want to thank you whoever you are. You came in and lay on my desk, probably through one of the women in the office and I thank them too, an issue of the Presbyterian Layman, a February/March nineteen seventy-eight issue of the Layman an organization within the UPCUSA, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. I had known about this task force recommending to the general assembly that homosexuals be ordained as ministers as ruling elders and deacons, but I had not seen the majority report and the minority report. In fact, I think, I had made reference in one of the messages to the Time article in which one of the conservatives had said, “Since the Bible is so explicit,” or rather the Time had said, “Since the Bible is so explicit, they the conservative evangelicals wonder if the church will have any biblical basis for imposing any restrictions on human behavior if it votes moral acceptance of active homosexuality.” In other words, the Bible is so plain on that point, if it votes that you should accept homosexuality not the homosexuals as people or to be compassionate towards them but to be concerned about them or to help them not that but to have moral acceptance of them then if you disagree, if you do not follow something that is such a flagrant violation of Scripture, how could you possibly set forth any kind of moral obligations upon men and women in the church of God.

Now, in the policy statement, very interesting here, is the report of the majority and here are some of the things that are said. Let's see if I can read them. “Avow practicing homosexual who meets the constitutional requirements may be ordained as ministers, ruling elders, and deacons. That's the report of the majority. That they should ordain avow practicing homosexual. The local church in the case of ruling elders and deacons and the presbytery in the case of ministers are the respective bodies to decide

whether avow practicing homosexual may be ordained. Avow practicing homosexual may be admitted to church membership if they are to affirm the churches membership vows. Homosexuality is a minor theme in the Bible. The church’s attitude toward homosexuality has been based on only a small number of biblical passages.” How many passages do you need? [Laughter] If God says something plainly once isn’t that sufficient?

But the facts are he has spoken many times about homosexuality. The Apostle Paul and the priests of Jerusalem assumed that homosexual relationships arise from perverse willful violations of nature. Yes, that’s right, they did. But of course, they are saying, “No it does not arise from these things. Homosexuality is not consciously chosen and is usually irreversible.” They’re engaging in psychology now, sociology. “The church must acknowledge its sin in mimicking society’s contempt toward homosexuals rather than extending God’s grace love compassion and justice.” We do extend God’s love, God’s grace, and God’s compassions, God’s justice to homosexuals just as we do to any sinner; sinners such as we are. After all, that’s how we came to be saved. We discovered our sin. Ours may not be homosexuality but, after all, there are other kinds of sin and some of them are very heinous. Sins of the mind that have become very popular and we never say anything about and they are just as sinful before God. We always extend God’s grace to sinners, but we don’t receive them as sinners when the Bible speaks against them. The church must confess and be healed of its fear of homosexuals referred to as homophobia. Priority attention must be given to the church to the continuing study of human sexuality including homosexuality.

Now, you can see, I think, from this that what we have here is a good illustration of a direct rejection of the teaching of the word of God. Now when we come to spiritual worship the thing that guides us in the worship and in the practice of the local churches, what do the Scriptures say and this was the essential error of Nadab and Abihu. Their worship arose out of their own will contrary to waiting upon the will of God, and the result was that God executed immediate judgment upon them.

Now, I think also, their worship was wrong in its content. They offered strange fire not strange incense, strange fire. Reference is made in the Bible to strange incense, incidentally, but strange fire what is the right kind of fire? The right kind of fire was fire off of the altar, the altar where the animals were slain, the altar that represented typically, ultimately, the shedding of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The altar, the fire of which suggested the Holy Spirit's probing of our Lord as the sin offering and punishing him for those for whom he stood provoking from him, ultimately, the cry, “My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?” Strange fire is fire that does not come from the altar. That is, strange fire is the fire that does not come from the cross antitypically and the atonement that is made there in his blood, but it is zeal that arises out of one's own self, one's own desirability. That is what he desires one's out of expediency, out of the devices of men. The fire that consumed the sacrifices on the altar was fire that had come from heaven. The fire of Nadab and Abihu came from themselves. You know in true worship the father is the object of worship. The son is the material of the worship. That word is not too good but I'll leave it that way. The spirit is the power by which the worship is carried out. All worship is worship of our Lord Jesus Christ, a worship of the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Well, this was strange fire. It was worship that was not connected with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It was worship that was not grounded in the atonement that he had accomplished. It was worship that arose from men rather than through the experience of redemption.

And may I conclude by saying that our priestly censer and incidentally now all of us are priests, the New Testament makes that plain. So that the things that Nadab and Abihu and Aaron and the rest of the priests did are things that have their counterparts in our own priestly activity today. “May our priestly censer ever bear upon it one material a pure incense beaten small,” that's the way the New Testament describes the incense that they had to offer. It was typical of Jesus Christ. It was that which when united with the fire of divine judgment resulted in the order of Christ ascending to the Father which

pleased him and caused him to rest. That’s the reason there was a golden altar of incense in the holy place and pure incense beaten small placed upon the fire taken off of the altar representing the cross resulted in pleasant smelling smoke that ascended to God.

You see the thing that pleases God is Jesus Christ. That is the one thing that pleases him. Christ is the one person that pleases him. All of our worship is to worship of redeemed souls who are pleased with Christ and who worship the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. Recognizing that our stand before God is based in his blood. That our life is the life that he has wrought and is working out within us and which we present to God for ourselves. All else from man’s nature is worthless. The incense from the ardor of natural devotion cannot possibly please him. How important it is then in our personal life that our worship of God should be in the spirit through the Son by virtue of what he has done on the cross.

Let me give you Paul’s word in conclusion. After he has spoken about the legalists and the false men he says, “For we are the true circumcision who worship in the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” Isn’t that beautiful? I rather like that. I wish I had written it myself. We are the true circumcision as over against the false circumcision, the Jewish legalists, they worship in the spirit of God. They glory in Christ Jesus. They bring Christ to the Father and they put no confidence in the flesh. Nothing that proceeds out of this old corrupt nature pleases God. May God help us to be just as careful in our worship as we are our understanding of the plan of salvation.

Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these lessons from the Old Testament. You so beautifully expressed to us the thing that pleases God. What does please Thee? Lord, Thou hast said Thee. Thou dost desire to be believed concerning the cross and the atonement and also concerning worship. And help us O God to be sure that our worship

of Thee is purified from the devices of men, the fads, the flim-flams, all of the other things that so characterize so much of shallow present-day Christianity. O God, may our worship of the Lord Jesus be truly in the spirit and in the truth. Help us to be pleased with him, glory in him, and to bring him to Thee for us.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.