

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

by

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"Things new and old."

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by

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Leviticus 10

The page of human history has ever been a sadly blotted one. It is a record of failure, from first to last. Amid all the delights of Eden, man hearkened to the tempter's lie (Genesis 3).

- when preserved from judgment, by the hand of electing love, and introduced into a restored earth, he was guilty of the sin of intemperance (Genesis 9).
- when conducted, by the Lord's outstretched arm, into the land of Canaan, he "**forsook; the Lord, and served Baal and Ashteroth**" (Judges 2:13).
- when placed at the very summit of earthly power and glory, with untold wealth at his feet, and all the resources of the world at his command, he gave his heart to the uncircumcised stranger. (I Kings 11).

No sooner had the blessings of the Gospel been promulgated than it became needful for the Holy Ghost to prophesy concerning "**grievous wolves,**" "**apostasy,**" and all manner of failure (Acts 20:29; I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5; II Peter 3; Jude). And, to crown all, we have the prophetic record of human apostasy from amid all the splendours of millennial glory (Revelation 20:7-10).

Thus, man spoils everything.

- place him in a position of highest dignity, and he will degrade himself.
- endow him with the most ample privileges, and he will abuse them.

- scatter blessings around him, in richest profusion, and he will prove ungrateful.
- place him in the midst of the most impressive institutions, and he will corrupt them.

Such is man! Such is nature, in its fairest forms, and under the most favourable circumstances!

Hence, therefore, we are, in a measure, prepared for the words with which our chapter opens.

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord which he commanded them not."

What a contrast to the scene with which our last section closed!

There all was done **"as the Lord commanded,"** and the result was, manifested glory. Here something is done which the Lord **"commanded them not,"** and the result is judgment:

- hardly had the echo of the shout of victory died away ere the elements of a spurious worship were prepared.
- hardly had the divine position been assured ere it was deliberately abandoned, through neglect of the divine commandment.
- hardly were those priests inaugurated, than they grievously failed in the discharge of their priestly functions.

And in what did their failure consist? Were they spurious priests? Were they mere pretenders? By no means. They were genuine sons of Aaron - true members of the priestly family - duly appointed priests. Their vessels of ministry and their priestly garments, too, would seem to have been alright. What, then, was their sin? Did they stain the curtains of the tabernacle with human blood, or pollute the sacred precincts with some crime which shocks the moral sense? We have no proof of their having done so.

Their sin was this: **"They offered strange fire before the Lord which he commanded them not."**

Here was their sin. They departed in their worship from the plain Word of the Lord, who had fully and plainly instructed them as to the mode of their worship. We have already alluded to the divine fullness and sufficiency of the Word of the Lord, in reference to every branch of priestly service. There was no room left for man to introduce what he might deem desirable or expedient. **"This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded"** was quite sufficient. It made all very plain and very simple. Nothing was needed, on man's part, save a spirit of implicit obedience to the divine command. But, herein, they failed.

Man has always proved himself ill-disposed to walk in the narrow path of strict adherence to the plain Word of GOD.

The by-path has ever seemed to present resistless charms to the poor human heart. **"Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant"** (Proverbs 9:17).

Such is the enemy's language; but the lowly, obedient heart knows full well that the path of subjection to the Word of GOD is the only one that leads to "**waters**" that are really "**sweet**," or to "**bread**" that can rightly be called "**pleasant**." Nadab and Abihu might have deemed one kind of "**fire**" as good as another; but it was not their province to decide as to that.

They should have acted according to the Word of the Lord; but, instead of this, they took their own way, and reaped the awful fruits thereof - "**He knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.**"

"And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them; and they died before the Lord."

How deeply Solemn! The Lord was dwelling in the midst of His people, to govern, to judge, and to act, according to the claims of His nature. At the close of Leviticus 9 we read, "**And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat.**" This was the Lord's acceptance of a true sacrifice. But, in Leviticus 10 it is His judgment upon erring priests. It is a double action of the same fire.

The burnt offering went up as a sweet odour; the "**strange fire**" was rejected as an abomination.

The Lord was glorified in the former; but it would have been a dishonour to accept the latter. Divine grace accepted and delighted in that which was a type of CHRIST's most precious sacrifice; divine holiness rejected that which was the fruit of man's corrupt will - a will never more hideous and abominable than when active in the things of GOD.

"Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified."

The dignity and glory of the entire economy depended upon the strict maintenance of the Lord's righteous claims. If these were to be trifled with, all was forfeited. If man were permitted to defile the sanctuary of the divine presence by "**strange fire**," there was an end to everything. Nothing could be permitted to ascend from the priestly censer but the pure fire, kindled from off the altar of GOD, and fed by the "**pure incense beaten small.**"

Beauteous type of true saintly worship, of which the Father is the object, CHRIST the material, and the Holy Ghost the power.

Man must not be allowed to introduce his devices into the worship of GOD. All his efforts can only issue in the presentation of "**strange fire**" - unhallowed incense - false worship. His very best attempts are an absolute abomination in the sight of GOD.

I speak not, here, of the honest struggles of earnest spirits searching after peace with GOD - of the sincere efforts of upright, though unenlightened, consciences, to attain to a knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, by works of law or the ordinances of systematic religion. All such will, doubtless, issue, through the exceeding goodness of GOD, in the clear light of a known and an enjoyed salvation. They prove, very clearly, that peace is earnestly sought; though, at the same time, they prove, just as clearly, that peace has not yet been found. There never yet was one, who

honestly followed the faintest glimmerings of light which fell upon his understanding, who did not, in due time, receive more. **"To him that hath shall more be given."** And again, **"The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."**

All this is as plain as it is encouraging; but it leaves wholly untouched the question of the human will, and its impious workings in connection with the service and worship of GOD. All such workings must, inevitably, call down, sooner or later, the solemn judgment of a righteous GOD who cannot suffer His claims to be trifled with. **"I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified."**

Men will be dealt with according to their profession. If men are honestly seeking, they will, assuredly, find; but, when men approach as worshippers, they are no longer to be regarded as seekers, but as those who profess to have found; and, then, if their priestly censer smokes with unhallowed fire, if they offer unto GOD the elements of a spurious worship, if they profess to tread His courts, unwashed, unsanctified, unsubdued, if they place on His altar the workings of their own corrupt will, what must be the result? Judgment! Yes, sooner or later, judgment must come. It may linger; but it will come. It could not be otherwise.

And not only must judgment come, at last; but there is, in every case, the immediate rejection, on the part of Heaven, of all worship which has not the Father for its object, CHRIST for its material, and the Holy Ghost for its power.

GOD's holiness is as quick; to reject all **"strange fire"** as His grace is ready to accept the faintest, feeblest breathings of a true heart. He must pour out His righteous judgment upon all false worship, though He will never **"quench the smoking flax nor break the bruised reed."**

The thought of this is most solemnizing, when one calls to mind the thousands of censers smoking with strange fire throughout the wide domain of Christendom. May the Lord, in His rich grace, add to the number of true worshippers who worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4).

It is infinitely happier to think of the true worship ascending, from honest hearts, to the throne of GOD, than to contemplate, even for a moment, the spurious worship on which the divine judgments must, ere long, be poured out. Every one who knows, through grace, the pardon of his sins, through the atoning Blood of JESUS, can worship the Father, in spirit and in truth. He knows the proper ground, the proper object, the proper title, the proper capacity of worship. These things can only be known in a divine way. They do not belong to nature or to earth. They are spiritual and heavenly.

Very much of that which passes among men for the worship of GOD is but **"strange fire"** after all. There is neither the pure fire nor the pure incense, and, therefore, Heaven accepts it not; and, albeit the divine judgment is not seen to fall upon those who present such worship, as it fell upon Nadab and Abihu, of old, this is only because **"God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."** It is not because the worship is acceptable to GOD, but because GOD is gracious.

The time, however, is rapidly approaching when the strange fire will be quenched for ever, when

the throne of GOD shall no longer be insulted by clouds of impure incense ascending from unpurged worshippers; when all that is spurious shall be abolished, and the whole universe shall be as one vast and magnificent temple, in which the one true GOD, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, shall be worshipped throughout the everlasting ages.

Grateful incense this, ascending
Ever to the Father's throne;
Every knee to JESUS bending,
All the mind in Heaven is one.

All the Father's counsels claiming
Equal honours to the Son,
All the Son's effulgence beaming,
Makes the Father's glory known.

By the Spirit all pervading,
Hosts unnumbered round the Lamb,
Crowned with light and joy unfading
Hail Him as the great "I AM."

For this the redeemed are waiting; and, blessed be GOD, it is but a little while when all their longing desires shall be fully met, and met for ever - yea met, after such a fashion, as to elicit from each and all the touching confession of Sheba's queen, that "**the half was not told me.**"

May the Lord hasten the happy time!

We must, now, return to our solemn chapter, and, lingering a little longer over it, endeavour to gather up and bear away with us some of its salutary teaching, for truly salutary it is, in an age like the present, when there is so much "**strange fire**" abroad.

There is something unusually arresting and impressive in the way in which Aaron received the heavy stroke of divine judgment. "**Aaron held his peace.**" It was a solemn scene. His two sons struck dead at his aide, smitten down by the fire of divine judgment. *

* Lest any reader should be troubled with a difficulty in reference to the souls of Nadab, and Abihu, I would say that no such question ought ever to be raised. In such cases as Nadab and Abihu, in Leviticus 10; Korah and his company, in Numbers 16; the whole congregation, Joshua and Caleb excepted, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, Numbers 14 and Hebrews 3; Achan and his family, Joshua 7; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5; those who were judged for abuses at the Lord's table, I Corinthians 11. In all such cases, the question of the soul's salvation is never raised. We are simply called to see, in them, the solemn actings of GOD, in government in the midst of His people. This relieves the mind from all difficulty. The Lord dwelt, of old, between the Cherubim, to judge His people in everything; and GOD the Holy Ghost dwells, now, in the church, to order and govern, according to the perfection of His presence. He was so really and personally present that

Ananias and Sapphira could lie to Him, and He could execute judgment upon them. It was as positive and as immediate an exhibition of His actings in government as we have in the matter of Nadab and Abihu, or Achan, or any other.

This is a great truth to get hold of. GOD is not only for His people, but with them, and in them. He is to be counted upon, for everything, whether it be great or small. He is present to comfort and help. He is there to chasten and judge. He is there for exigence of every hour. He is sufficient. Let faith count upon Him. **"Where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I"** (Matthew 18:20). And, assuredly, where He is, we want no more.

He had but just seen them clothed in their garments of glory and beauty - washed, robed, and anointed.

- they had stood with him, before the Lord, to be inaugurated into the priestly office.
- they had offered, in company with him, the appointed sacrifices.
- they had seen the beams of the divine glory darting from the Shekinah.
- they had seen the fire of the Lord fall upon the sacrifice and consume it.
- they had heard the shout of triumph issuing from an assembly of adoring worshippers.

All this had but recently passed before him; and now, alas! his two sons lie at his side, in the grasp of death. The fire of the Lord which so recently fed upon an acceptable sacrifice, had, now, fallen in judgment upon them, and what could he say? Nothing. **"Aaron held his peace."**

"I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it."

It was the hand of GOD; and although it might, in the judgment of flesh and blood, seem to be a very heavy hand, yet he had only to bow his head, in silent awe and reverent acquiescence. **"I was dumb . . . because thou didst it."**

This was the suited attitude, in the presence of the divine visitation. Aaron, doubtless, felt that the very pillars of his house were shaken by the thunder of divine judgment; and he could only stand, in silent amazement, in the midst of the soul subduing scene. A father bereaved of his two sons, and, in such a manner, and under such circumstances, was no ordinary case.

It furnished a deeply-impressive commentary upon the words of the Psalmist, **"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints; and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him"** (Psalm 89). **"Who would not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?"**

May we learn to walk softly in the divine presence - to tread the Lord's courts with unshod foot and reverent spirit. May our priestly censer ever bear upon it the one material, the beaten incense of CHRIST's manifold perfections, and may the power of the Spirit kindle up the hallowed flame. All else is not only worthless, but vile. Everything that springs from nature's energy, everything produced by the actings of the human will, the most fragrant incense of man's devising, the most intense ardour of natural devotion, will all issue in **"strange fire"** and evoke the solemn judgment of the Lord GOD Almighty.

Oh! for a thoroughly truthful heart, and worshipping spirit, in the presence of our GOD and Father, continually!

But let not any upright, though timid, heart be discouraged or alarmed. It is too often the case that those who really ought to be alarmed take no heed; while those for whom the Spirit of grace would only design a Word of comfort and encouragement, apply to themselves, in a wrong way, the startling warnings of Holy Scripture. No doubt, the meek and contrite heart that trembles at the Word of the Lord, is in a safe condition; but then we should remember that a father warns his child, not because he does not regard him as his child, but because he does; and one of the happiest proofs of the relationship is the disposition to receive and profit by the warning.

The parental voice, even though its tone be that of solemn admonition, will reach the child's heart, but, certainly, not to raise, in that heart, a question as to its relationship with the one who speaks. If a son were to question his sonship whenever his father warns, it would be a poor affair indeed. The judgment which had just fallen upon Aaron's house did not make him doubt that he was really a priest. It merely had the effect of teaching him how to conduct himself in that high and holy position.

"And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people; but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses."

Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar, were to remain unmoved in their elevated place - their holy dignity - their position of priestly sanctity. Neither the failure, nor yet the judgment consequent thereon, was to be allowed to interfere with those who wore the priestly robes, and were anointed with **"the oil of the Lord."**

That holy oil had placed them in a sacred enclosure where the influences of sin, of death, and of judgment could not reach them.

Those who were outside, who were at a distance from the sanctuary, who were not in the position of priests, they might **"bewail the burning;"** but as for Aaron and his sons, they were to go on in the discharge of their hallowed functions, as though nothing had happened. Priests in the sanctuary were not to bewail, but to worship. They were not to weep, as in the presence of death, but to bow their anointed heads, in presence of the divine visitation. **"The fire of the Lord"** might act, and do its solemn work of judgment; but, to a true priest, it mattered not what that **"fire"** had come to do, whether to express the divine approval, by consuming a sacrifice, or the divine displeasure, by consuming the offerers of **"strange fire,"** he had but to Worship.

That **"fire"** was a well-known manifestation of the divine presence, in Israel of old, and whether it acted in **"mercy or in judgment,"** the business of all true priests was to worship.

"I will sing of mercy and of judgment; unto thee, O Lord, will I sing."

There is a deep and holy lesson for the soul in all this.

Those who are brought nigh to GOD, in the power of the blood, and by the anointing of the Holy Ghost, must move in a sphere beyond the range of nature's influences. Priestly nearness to GOD gives the soul such an insight into all His ways, such a sense of the rightness of all His dispensations, that one is enabled to worship in His presence, even though the stroke of His hand has removed from us the object of tender affection.

It may be asked, Are we to be *stoics*? I ask, were Aaron and his sons *stoics*? Nay, they were priests. Did they not feel as men? Yes; but they worshipped as priests. This is profound. It opens up a region of thought, feeling, and experience, in which nature can never move - a region of which, with all its boasted refinement and sentimentality, nature knows absolutely nothing. We must tread the sanctuary of GOD, in true priestly energy, in order to enter into the depth, meaning, and power of such holy mysteries.

The Prophet Ezekiel was called, in his duty, to sit down to this difficult lesson.

"Also the Word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men . . . And I did in the morning as I was commanded" (Ezekiel 24:16-18).

It will be said that all this was as "**a sign**" to Israel. True; but it proves that in prophetic testimony, as well as in priestly worship, we must rise superior to all the claims and influences of nature and of earth. Aaron's sons and Ezekiel's wife were cut down with a stroke; and, yet, neither the priest nor the prophet was to uncover his head or shed a tear.

Oh! my reader, how far have you and I progressed in this profound lesson?

No doubt, both reader and writer have to make the same humiliating confession. Too often, alas! we "**walk as men**" and "**eat the bread of men.**" Too often are we robbed of our high priestly privileges by the workings of nature and the influences of earth. These things must be watched against. Nothing save realized priestly nearness to GOD can ever preserve the heart from the power of evil, or maintain its spiritual tone. All believers are priests unto GOD, and nothing can possibly deprive them of their position as such. But though they cannot lose their position, they may grievously fail in the discharge of their functions. These things are not sufficiently distinguished. Some there are who, while looking at the precious truth of the believer's security, forget the possibility of his failing in the discharge of his priestly functions. Others, on the contrary, looking at the failure, venture to call in question the security.

Now, I desire that my reader should keep clear of both the above errors.

- he should be fully established in the divine doctrine of the eternal security of every member of the true priestly house; but
- he should also bear in mind the possibility of failure, and the constant need of watchfulness and

prayer, lest he should fail.

May all those who have been brought to know the hallowed elevation of priests unto GOD be preserved, by His heavenly grace, from every species of failure, whether it be personal defilement, or the presentation of any of the varied forms of "**strange fire**" which abound so in the professing church.

"And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations; and that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; and that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses" (Ver. 8-11).

The effect of wine is to excite nature, and all natural excitement hinders that calm, well-balanced condition of soul which is essential to the proper discharge of the priestly office. So far from using any means to excite nature, we should treat it as a thing having no existence. Thus only shall we be in a moral condition to serve in the sanctuary, to form a dispassionate judgment between clean and unclean, and to expound and communicate the mind of GOD. It devolves upon each one to judge, for himself, what, in his special case, would act as "**wine or strong drink.**" *

* Some have thought that, owing to the special place which this direction about wine occupies, Nadab and Abihu must have been under the influence of strong drink, when they offered the "**strange fire.**" But, be this as it may, we have to be thankful for a most valuable principle, in reference to our conduct, as spiritual priests. We are to refrain from everything which would produce the same effect upon our spiritual man, as strong drink produces upon the physical man.

The things which excite mere nature are manifold indeed - wealth, ambition, politics, the varied objects of emulation around us in the world. All these things act, with exciting power, upon nature, and entirely unfit us for every department of priestly service. If the heart be swollen with feelings of pride, covetousness, or emulation, it is utterly impossible that the pure air of the sanctuary can be enjoyed, or the sacred functions of priestly ministry discharged. Men speak of the versatility of genius, or a capacity to turn quickly from one thing to another. But the most versatile genius that was ever possessed could not enable a man to pass from an unhallowed arena of literary, commercial, or political competition, into the holy retirement of the sanctuary of the divine presence; nor could it ever adjust the eye that had become dimmed by the influence of such scenes, so as to enable it to discern, with priestly accuracy, the difference between holy and unholy, and between "**unclean and clean.**"

No, my reader, GOD's priests must keep themselves apart from "**wine and strong drink.**" Theirs is a path of holy separation and abstraction. They are to be raised far above the influence of earthly joy as well as earthly sorrow. If they have ought to do with "**strong wine,**" it is only that it may be poured unto the Lord for a drink offering, "**in the holy place**" (Numbers 28:7).

In other words, the joy of GOD's priests is not the joy of earth, but the joy of Heaven, the joy of

the sanctuary. "**The joy of the Lord is their strength.**"

It needs hardly to be remarked that the Christian should be most jealous over himself as to the use of wine or strong drink. Timothy, as we know, needed an apostolic recommendation to induce him even to touch it, for his health's sake (I Timothy 5). A beautiful proof of Timothy's habitual self-denial, and of the thoughtful love of the Spirit, in the apostle. I must confess that one's moral sense is offended by seeing Christians making use of strong drink in cases where it is, very manifestly, not medicinal. I rarely, if ever, see a spiritual person indulge in such a thing. One trembles to see a Christian the mere slave of a habit, whatever that habit may be. It proves that he is not keeping his body in subjection, and he is in great danger of being "**disapproved**" (I Corinthians 9:27).

Would that all this holy instruction were more deeply pondered by us!

We, surely, stand much in need of it. If our priestly responsibilities are not duly attended to, all must be deranged.

When we contemplate the camp of Israel, we may observe three circles, and the innermost of these circles had its center in the sanctuary:

- there was first the circle of men of war (Numbers 1, 2).
- then the circle of Levites round about the tabernacle (Numbers 3, 4). And, lastly,
- the innermost circle of priests, ministering in the holy place.

Now, let it be remembered that the believer is called to move in all those circles:

- he enters into conflict, as a man of war (Ephesians 6:11-17; I Timothy 1:18; 6:12; II Timothy 4:7).
- he serves, as a Levite, in the midst of his brethren, according to his measure and sphere (Matthew 14:14, 15; Luke 19:12, 13). Finally,
- he sacrifices and worships, as a priest, in the holy place (Hebrews 13:15, 16; I Peter 2:5, 9).

The last of these shall endure for ever. And, moreover, it is as we are enabled, now, to move aright in that holy circle, that all other relations and responsibilities are rightly discharged. Hence, every thing that incapacitates us for our priestly functions - every thing that draws us off from the center of that innermost circle, in which it is our privilege to move - every thing, in short, that tends to derange our priestly relation, or dim our priestly vision, must, of necessity, unfit us for the service which we are called to render, and for the warfare which we are called to wage.

These are weighty considerations. Let us dwell upon them:

- the heart must be kept right
- the conscience pure
- the eye single
- the spiritual vision undimmed.

The soul's business in the holy place must be faithfully and diligently attended to, else we shall go all wrong. Private communion with GOD must be kept up, else we shall be fruitless, as servants, and defeated, as men of war. It is vain for us to bustle about, and run hither and thither, in what we call service, or indulge in vapid words about Christian armour and Christian warfare. If we are not keeping our priestly garments unspotted, and if we are not keeping ourselves free from all that would excite nature, we shall, assuredly, break down. The priest must keep his heart with all diligence, else the Levite will fail, and the warrior will be defeated.

It is, let me repeat it, the business of each one to be fully aware of what it is that to him proves to be "**wine and strong drink**" - what it is that produces excitement - that blunts his spiritual perception, or dims his priestly vision. It may be an auction mart, a cattle-show, a newspaper. It may be the merest trifle. But no matter what it is, if it tends to excite, it will disqualify us for priestly ministry; and if we are disqualified as priests, we are unfit for everything, inasmuch as our success in every department and in every sphere must ever depend upon our cultivating a spirit of worship.

Let us, then, exercise a spirit of self-judgment - a spirit of watchfulness over our habits, our ways, and our associations; and when we, by grace, discover ought that tends, in the smallest degree, to unfit us for the elevated exercises of the sanctuary, let us put it away from us, cost what it may. Let us not suffer ourselves to be the slaves of a habit. Communion with GOD should be dearer to our hearts than all beside; and just in proportion as we prize that communion, shall we watch and pray against anything that would rob us of it - everything that would excite, ruffle, or unhinge. *

* Some, perhaps, may think that the warning of Leviticus 10:9 affords a warrant for occasional indulgence in those things which tend to excite the natural mind, inasmuch as it is said, "**Do not drink wine nor strong drink . . . when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation.**" To this we may reply, that the sanctuary is not a place which the Christian is, occasionally, to visit, but a place in which he is, habitually, to serve and worship. It is the sphere in which he should "**live, and move, and have his being.**" The more we live in the presence of GOD, the less can we bear to be out of it; and no one who knows the deep joy of being there could lightly indulge in ought that would take or keep him hence. There is not that object within the compass of earth which would, in the judgment of a spiritual mind, be an equivalent for one hour's fellowship with GOD.

"And Moses spake unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar, and unto Ithamar, his sons that were left, Take the meat offering that remaineth of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar; for it is most holy: and ye shall eat it in the holy place, because it is thy due, and thy sons' due, of the sacrifices of the Lord made by fire; for so I am commanded" (Ver. 12, 13).

There are few things in which we are more prone to fail than in the maintenance of the divine standard, when human failure has set in.

Like David, when the Lord made a breach upon Uzza, because of his failure in putting his hand

to the ark, "**He was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the ark of God home to me?**" (I Chronicles 13:12).

It is exceedingly difficult to bow to the divine judgment, and, at the same time, to hold fast the divine ground. The temptation is to lower the standard, to come down from the lofty elevation, to take human ground. We must ever carefully guard against this evil, which is all the more dangerous as wearing the garb of modesty, self-distrust, and humility.

Aaron and his sons, notwithstanding all that had occurred, were to eat the meat offering in the holy place. They were to do so, not because all had gone on in perfect order, but "**because it is thy due,**" and "**so I am commanded.**"

Though there had been failure, yet their place was in the tabernacle; and those who were there had certain "**dues**" founded upon the divine commandment. Though man had failed ten thousand times over, the Word of the Lord could not fail; and that Word had secured certain privileges for all true priests, which it was their place to enjoy. Were GOD's priests to have nothing to eat, no priestly food, because failure had set in? Were those that were left to be allowed to starve, because Nadab and Abihu had offered "**strange fire?**" This would never do. GOD is faithful, and He can never allow any one to be empty in His blessed presence. The prodigal may wander, and squander, and come to poverty; but it must ever hold good that "**in my Father's house is bread enough and to spare.**"

"**And the wave breast and the heave shoulder shall ye eat in a clean place; thou, and thy sons, and thy daughters with thee: for they be thy due, and thy sons' due, which are given out of the sacrifices of peace offerings of the children of Israel . . . by a statute for ever; as the Lord hath commanded**" (Ver. 14, 15).

What strength and stability we have here!

All the members of the priestly family, "**daughters**" as well as "**sons**" - all, whatever be the measure of energy or capacity, are to feed upon "**the breast**" and "**the shoulder,**" the affections and the strength of the true Peace Offering, as raised from the dead, and presented, in resurrection, before GOD. This precious privilege is theirs as, "**given, by a statute for ever, as the Lord hath commanded.**" This makes all "**sure and steadfast,**" come what may. Men may fail, and come short; strange fire may be offered, but GOD's priestly family must never be deprived of the rich and gracious portion which divine love has provided, and divine faithfulness secured, "**by a statute for ever.**"

However, we must distinguish between those privileges which belonged to all the members of Aaron's family, "**daughters**" as well as "**sons,**" and those which could only be enjoyed by the male portion of the family. This point has already been referred to, in the notes on the offerings. There are certain blessings which are the common portion of all believers, simply as such; and there are those which demand a higher measure of spiritual attainment and priestly energy to apprehend and enjoy.

Now, it is worse than vain, yea, it is impious, to set up for the enjoyment of this higher measure, when we really have it not. It is one thing to hold fast the privileges which are "**given**" of GOD,

and can never be taken away, and quite another to assume a measure of spiritual capacity to which we have never attained. No doubt, we ought to desire earnestly the very highest measure of priestly communion, the most elevated order of priestly privilege. But, then, desiring a thing, and assuming to have it, are very different.

This thought will throw light upon the closing paragraph of our chapter.

"And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt: and he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron which were left, saying, Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God hath given it to you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord? Behold, the blood of it was not brought in within the holy place: ye should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded And Aaron said unto Moses, Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord; and such things have befallen me; and if I had eaten the sin offering today, should it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord And when Moses heard that, he was content."

The "**daughters**" of Aaron were not permitted to eat of "**the sin offering**." This high privilege belonged only to the "**sons**," and it was a type of the most elevated form of priestly service.

To eat of the sin offering was the expression of full identification with the offerer, and this demanded an amount of priestly capacity and energy which found its type in "**the sons of Aaron**."

On the occasion before us, however, it is very evident that Aaron and his sons were not in a condition to rise to this high and holy ground. They ought to have been, but they were not. "**Such things have befallen me**," said Aaron. This, no doubt, was to be deplored; but, yet, "**when Moses heard it, he was content**." It is far better to be real in the confession of our failure and shortcoming, than to put forth pretensions to spiritual power which are wholly without foundation.

Thus, then, Leviticus 10 opens with positive sin, and closes with negative failure.

Nadab and Abihu offered "**strange fire**;" and Eleazar and Ithamar were unable to eat the sin offering. The former was met by divine judgment; the latter, by divine forbearance. There could be no allowance for "**strange fire**." It was positively flying in the face of GOD's plain commandment. There is, obviously, a wide difference between a deliberate rejection of a plain command, and mere inability to rise to the height of a divine privilege. The former is open dishonour done to GOD; the latter is a forfeiture of one's own blessing. There should be neither the one nor the other, but the difference between the two is easily traced.

May the Lord, in His infinite grace, ever keep us abiding in the secret retirement of His holy presence, abiding in His love, and feeding upon His truth. Thus shall we be preserved from "**strange fire**," and "**strong drink**" - from false worship of every kind, and fleshly excitement, in all its forms. Thus, too, shall we be enabled to carry ourselves aright in every department of priestly ministrations, and to enjoy all the privileges of our priestly position.

The communion of a Christian is like a sensitive plant. It is easily hurt by the rude influences of an evil world. It will expand beneath the genial action of the air of Heaven; but must firmly shut itself up from the chilling breath of time and sense. Let us remember these things, and ever seek to keep close within the sacred precincts of the divine presence. There, all is pure, safe, and happy.

Far from a world of grief and sin,
With GOD eternally shut in.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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