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Profane Fire

“Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” Leviticus 10:1-2

Paul reminds us in Romans 15:4, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” What can we learn from Nadab and Abihu?

Various commentators say that Nadab and Abihu were offering this worship at the wrong time and may have entered into a part of the Tabernacle that they were not to enter. These two sons of Aaron had just been consecrated as priests and had witnessed the glory of the Lord as He came down and fire came out from heaven and consumed the burnt offering on the altar before the Tabernacle. When the people saw it they shouted and fell on their faces.

Nadab and Abihu evidently took common fire from another place than from the brazen altar from which the Lord had commanded it should be taken. The word translated “profane” in Leviticus 10 is elsewhere translated “foreign,” especially with reference to foreign gods. The Bible specifically states that they did something that God had not commanded them to do. They took it upon themselves to worship as they felt they wanted to worship. They may have forgotten a very important truth that worship is an offering to God and not to man. It was to be according to God’s word and not man’s desires.

In his book *Old Testament Bible History* Alfred Edersheim states, “We repeat it: the Book of Leviticus is intended for Israel as the people of God; it is the statute book of Israel’s spiritual life; and, on both these grounds, it is neither simply legal, in the sense of ordinary law, nor yet merely ceremonial, but **throughout symbolical and typical**. Accordingly, its deeper truths apply to all times and to all men.” So how can we apply these truths to ourselves today?

We are living in a time when people believe they should be able to do whatever they want whenever they want with no questions asked. Perhaps one of the false notions exhibited by Nadab and Abihu is one that is very common today: what difference does it make? We are fond of taking this line of reasoning in many aspects of our lives today, from the clothing we wear to the language we use. And these same rationalizations show up in our approach to worship of God as well. We may decide that we will save the best for ourselves and give God the leftovers... what difference does it make anyway? The next time we are tempted to reason within ourselves this way, maybe we should remember Nadab and Abihu. Are we offering profane fire that God has not commanded?

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” John 4:23