

## Profanity

Leviticus 10:1-20

When I say the word profanity, you probably think of those four letter words that you never used to hear on television. You probably think of that group of “cuss words” that you should have been taught by your parents not to say. You probably think of words that are vulgar or abusive.

There is a deeper meaning to the word profanity, however. And that’s what I want to focus upon this afternoon. Something “profane” is actually something that is common. Profanity, therefore, is something which refers to something special as merely ordinary. That’s why references to the marriage relationship which are not respectfully polite are called profanity! For that good and pure physical enjoyment of the intimacy of marriage with which God has blessed the relationship is spoken of with contempt. With impurity. With disrespect. That’s profanity. And it should be offensive to you.

Actually, a good antonym, or opposite, for the word profane is the word sacred. Profanity treats as ordinary what ought to be treated with the highest reverence and honor, and ultimately, it is blasphemy when the holy things of God are treated with such dishonor. So references to God’s holy name, spoken carelessly and with honor, are considered profanity. And you should include abbreviations and euphemisms in that category, for if we speak of God with a euphemism, we are speaking of him lightly. It’s profanity.

Likewise, the works of his justice and eternal condemnation, and all references to the eternal damnation of the lost in the pains of the fires of hell need to be spoken with honor. And respect for God’s glory. Not as words of profanity.

So also with worship. All that we do in worship must be held up as sacred, and treated with special honor and dignity, for the goal of worship is the advancement of the glory of God. Worship is the very opposite of that which is profane, for it is not common or ordinary. It is not just another activity in which we are engaged. It is our coming together in the presence of God to recognize his glory and sacrifice our sacred offerings unto him.

Your acts of worship are distinct from everything else that you do. They are sacred. And as we worship, this is a sacred place, a sanctuary. This is a sacred activity. Not profane. Not common or ordinary. But holy.

That’s why you dress and appear in a certain manner, not because your clothes are essential, but as an expression of your heart, they do give outward evidence that what we are doing now is something special. This isn’t a social gathering. It is not a time of mere fellowship. This is something in an entirely different category from a church picnic. Or a baseball game. Those are ordinary events, common. And to describe them as profane does not mean that they are sinful! Not at all. Just common and ordinary.

And what we are doing now is not. This is a sacred event.

The sons of Aaron learned that lesson the hard way. They thought they could offer to God any sacrifice of worship that they wanted. Anywhere. Anytime. And they paid with their lives for their sacrilegious disregard for God’s own regulations regarding worship.

v.1-2

Now, that ought to get your attention! And maybe it bothers you. Maybe just a little, this just doesn’t sit well with you. It

seems that God is awfully harsh, doesn't it? So let's learn why this was such a grave offense bringing about such a grievous judgment.

### **I. A GRAVE OFFENSE.**

All this took place no later than the day following the events of chapter 9, when Aaron and his sons were anointed as priests. Right away. After seeing their father, Aaron, go in with Moses to the Holy Place, the two oldest sons show themselves impatient. Perhaps they simply wanted to take a more prominent part in conducting the service. In any event, it was a daring and presumptuous action.

There is even the suggestion by some commentators that they were drunk, since the command was given so clearly in verse 9, for the priests to totally abstain from wine. And maybe they were drunk, though we certainly can't say that for sure. But we can say that their sin was deliberate. Nadab and Abihu offered profane fire. And Moses tells us exactly what that means. It was,

#### **A. A sacrifice of worship which God had not commanded.** v.1

How was this particular sacrifice unauthorized? Three ways, at least. First, they did it at a time not commanded. There is no reference to Aaron authorizing the time of this sacrifice, and that would have been necessary.

Second, it was offered in the wrong place, in part of the tabernacle not set aside for the offering of incense, for they were in the open court where Uzziel's sons found their bodies, according to verse 4. They were not at the golden altar!

And third, most seriously, this sacrifice was offered in a

manner contrary to God's revealed will. The priests had been taught that the only fire to be used in the tabernacle was to be fire from the altar.

But these boys used their own fire. At their own location. In their own time. They were presumptuous! And grossly negligent, in their disobedience to God's holy laws.

Now, many people today would read this account and relegate it to that category of Old Testament events that have nothing to do with our lives today. But to do that is to miss the point, and to miss the significance of what Paul writes to Timothy when he says that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So how are we instructed in righteousness here? How are we made complete, equipped for every good work? And the answer, first and foremost, is to grasp how seriously God considers our worship.

Nadab and Abihu violated God's regulations for worship, "so fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."

We can't immediately disregard that punishment as typical of the God of Old Testament, because we read of the God of the New Testament, the same God, bringing forth a similar judgment. Remember Ananias and Sapphira?

Acts 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid

it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? 4 "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him. [The same fate awaited his wife.] 7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?" She said, "Yes, for so much." 9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband. 11 So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things."

I guess so! That would certainly get my attention. As it did for Aaron and the others of his sons who would serve as priests. This was to be,

**B. An example to notice.**

v.4-7

That was certainly a public spectacle! They were carried out by their tunics, their clothing not even burned up by this fire of judgment from God. Everyone who saw their presumptuous sin now saw their doom!

According to verse 4, the sons of Aaron's uncle where to carry out the bodies. And Moses prohibited Aaron and his younger two

sons from observing the normal customs of grief, according to verse 6. Why?

The first observation I would make is that this is a demonstration of God's grace, for God clearly tells Aaron that he is still to be the high priest! Aaron and his other sons were to remain in their position as priests. They were to continue in their duties in the sanctuary, despite the sins of the older two sons.

And to remain faithful to those duties, they also had to recognize that God's actions were just! Though they personally would have grieved, as priests they would continue to show forth the righteousness and appropriateness of God's judgment.

And that judgment was certainly a public display of God's justice. The Lord directed the fire such that the men were struck, but nothing besides. Not even their clothes. This was fire from God, not merely an accident. The stroke of God's justice came upon those who were guilty. And everyone in the camp saw it, for the dead bodies were carried out before them all.

It was a public sin, with very public consequences. Such examples are valuable for us, even if they are rather uncomfortable, and I want to emphasize that value for us today. There is another similar example of the consequences of sin that Paul mentions in,

1 Cor. 10:1 "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the

wilderness. 6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." 8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

There is great encouragement in the very next verse, 1 Cor. 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Surely that encouragement shows forth the marvelous grace of God. But with that encouragement, is a genuine warning. Verse 11, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition."

So I would say that Leviticus 10 was also written for our admonition! And to be honest, there is nothing here that forces you to conclude that Nadab and Abihu were actually condemned to hell. There is no necessity to conclude that these men were unbelievers, and therefore judged by God as such. The same, I would say for Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Rather, the consequences of sin is highlighted. And that warning and admonition is valuable for us, too, as believers.

Could God still bring death to a person, as the consequences

of sin? Certainly! Could that consequence of sin be the paternal discipline of a loving father toward his beloved children, and not the condemnation of an unbeliever to hell? Sure it could.

God takes sin seriously. And he considers sins of worship to be of the utmost importance.

So what shall we learn from this, in a positive way? The warning is self-evident. But Moses includes positive encouragement as well, for Aaron as well as for us. Those positive instructions could be summarized by referring to,

## **II. THE NECESSARY ATTITUDE OF THE WORSHIPER.**

If what Nadab and Abihu did was so bad that it brought about their death, what is that we ought to be doing instead? How should we be different?

I would mention first,

### **A. A distinction between the sacred and the profane!**

All the specific applications have changed with the doing away of the ceremonial laws, but the principles remain valid and true. v.8-11

Let me give you an example with direct implications for us today. Turn to,

Ezekiel 22:26 "Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them."

How dreadful it is in our culture when the day which God has set aside as holy is profaned! When it is made normal. Ordinary.

Routine. Just like any other day. This is a holy day, the Lord himself hallowed it! And according to Jesus, he did it for us! For our benefit!

Yet I don't need to emphasize just much we, in our day, profane that holy day.

We also profane the holy acts of worship when we contaminate them with the secular affairs of life, when we include in worship, those things that belong to the ordinary affairs of life, but are not prescribed as elements of worship. We do the same when we treat worship lightly. As unimportant, or optional. When we come to worship unprepared in heart and soul, and attend to the worship services without our full attention and devotion given to God.

And in this sacred work of worship, we need to be moved by the working of the holy spirit in our hearts, not by external stimulants. So the command to Aaron regarding alcohol finds its fulfillment in Paul's exhortation,

Eph. 5:18 "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit."

And as you are filled with that Holy Spirit, give unto God,

### **B. A holy offering in a holy place.**

v.12-15

And what does the New Testament say about holy offerings in holy places? Turn to,

1 Tim. 2:8 "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

"Everywhere" there is actually "every place." And I do believe that reference is in contrast to the single place prescribed by Old Testament worship. Now, the "holy place" is EVERY place, every place where we gather together in spirit and in truth, in Jesus' name. And in every holy place, what do we do in worship? We lift up holy hands!

Hands made pure by the blood of Christ. And hands which have been separated from sin, hands devoted to serving God. Hands of sincerity and truth. Only then can you worship God acceptably.

We are still called to bring a holy offering in a holy place. And Psalm 24 is still appropriate.

Ps. 24:3 "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully."

So if your hands are dirty, contaminated by unrepentant sin, whose guilty stains have not been washed away by the blood of Christ, you cannot bring to God a holy offering!

There must also be,

### **C. A concern for the inward sincerity of worship.**

And actually, that's what we see with Aaron, despite his apparent disregard for one of the ceremonial obligations that fell upon him. His sons had failed to eat the goat of the sin offering, as the law required.

v.16-18

Aaron gave the explanation for his sins.

v.19

Technically, Moses was correct. But Aaron's explanation showed forth a sincere heart, and so although the offense was exposed and acknowledged, no further rebuke was necessary.  
v.20

Clearly, God is gracious here, not bringing upon Aaron and his sons any further discipline. Though Aaron's sons should have eaten the sacrifice according to the law, yet the sincerity of their hearts was recognized. And Aaron's worship was accepted.

Finally, one more thing. Really the climax of this whole chapter, the one verse that stands out above all the others for our edification. Verse 3. Moses tells Aaron exactly what the Lord said after Aaron's sons were killed.  
v.3

There it is! There is the positive, perpetual and moral command that is for us as God's people in the New Covenant. When we come near to God, we must regard him as holy. We must come to him, always, at all times, with the intent of glorifying him. It is a total and,

#### **D. Complete regard for the holiness of God.**

Now, the HOW has changed! How we show that regard has changed. In the Old Covenant, it meant external ceremonies. Regard for the holiness of God required the sacrifice of blood, and all sorts of ceremonial regulations, all of which are done away with in Christ. As we are taught in Hebrews 9, those things are "concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation."

Our concern, as Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well, is no longer which mountain ought to be the place of the temple. Rather, we worship in spirit and in truth.

And those words address the attitude as well as the actions of our worship. We are to worship sincerely, without the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And we worship according to the truth of God's word, offering those sacrifices prescribed for New Testament worship.

And in doing so, we treat God as holy! We don't take God's presence lightly. Worship is not casual, in the sense that you cannot be casual in the presence of perfect holiness! Every time to you enter a service of worship, you ought to be reminded of that glorious splendor of God's presence, and seek, above anything else, to honor him!

Now, remember what we learned from the example of those Old Testament sacrifices in chapters 1-7, that teach us that our sins have been atoned for. The guilt of our sins has been removed. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So I am addressing you who are redeemed. You who are the children of God, you who are saved by grace through faith, you who love the Lord with all your heart and soul because God has given you a new heart!

Your reverence for God's glory is not a good work that you do in order to obtain your salvation. There is no merit in any of your works, as the ground eternal life. But in Christ, as Christians, it is our duty to approach God with such a zeal for HIS glory. Always. And most especially, when we come to him with the sacrifices of our worship.

So what is the goal of the church? Or, what should it be? What are we trying to accomplish? What am I trying to accomplish in my preaching?

I could answer that question a lot of ways. Using Scripture. I

could quote, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, and declare that the goal is your instruction in righteousness that you may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” That is a correct answer.

I could answer those questions by quoting from Mat. 28, what we call the great commission, “Make disciples.” That’s the purpose. “Teaching people to observe all things that Jesus has commanded.” And that’s true. We ought to be doing that.

But there is something deeper. For Scripture tells us that God is seeking a certain group of people. And he doesn’t call them disciples. But he calls those disciples something deeper. He calls them worshipers!

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

Dear friends, the father is seeking worshipers! And that’s why the book of Leviticus is so important. Because it shows us what worship is all about. More than anything else, you are to be worshipers.

This is what we want our children to be. The kind of worshipers the Father seeks. This is our invitation of the gospel to the world. It is the calling to worship our great and gracious God.

Worship must be preserved as sacred, for God has spoken, “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.”

I will end with a common call to worship.

Ps. 96:7 “Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Give

to the LORD glory and strength. 8 Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. 9 Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.”