

LESSONS LEARNED FROM NADAB & ABIHU

Introduction:

- I. The names Nadab and Abihu will immediately conjure up negative thoughts in the mind of most Bible students. The Biblical information we have of these two priests is brief, but enough to reveal the deficiency of their character and to tell us that we should not want to follow in their steps. The story of Nadab and Abihu is found in Lev. 10:1-3 and that will be our text for this lesson.
- II. The tabernacle that God commanded to be built was erected at great expense and the completion of it was the focus of universal applaud and approval among the Israelites. No work was withheld, no cost was considered and no difficulty deliberated; all classes and ranks of people were employed in the building of the tabernacle. It was framed according to the pattern set forth by God in the mount and with its completion, the children of Israel rejoiced with an elevated joy. Now finally the day came when Aaron and his sons would be consecrated for the office of priest. And after seven days of consecration, Aaron would now break new ground and offer the first sacrifice in the newly erected tabernacle (**9:22-24**). And so the offering was made, the people were blessed, and the sacrifice was accepted by God. Indeed this was a good time in which we see the inauguration of the temple and the priesthood. But oh how fast something good can turn bad! In what could not have been more than a short time later, we find Nadab and Abihu sinning against God. This brings us to our text.
- III. **The Text - Lev. 10:1-3:**

Ver. 1: The fire these young priest offered was strange because it was unauthorized. Indeed, all that they did on this occasion was contrary to law. They offered fire that was not commanded, and they offered an offering at an unauthorized time. Their act was reckless and impulsive, and thoughtless. They went beyond the word of God. They took their own way instead of God's way, and that is always a dangerous and precarious thing to do. Their act was a flagrant exhibition of insubordination towards divine authority. So then, a price would have to be paid.

Ver. 2: Isn't it ironic that the same fire which shortly before had consumed the accepted sacrifice (**9:24**), now struck Nadab and Abihu, and the Bible says "*they died before the Lord.*" Thus, on the very day of their consecration to the priesthood, because they had not sanctified the Lord in their hearts, but rather offered Him a worship of their own devising, the judgment of God fell upon them. So, we learn that if man will act disobediently towards God, he must pay the price for "*our God is a consuming fire*" (**Heb. 12:29**).

Ver. 3: These two men acted foolishly. But as always God has the last word. He would sanctify Himself by their judgment, and be glorified before all the people. And so again we must understand, if we do not honor God by our reverence, He shall get honor in our punishment.

Lesson: Lessons From Nadab & Abihu

I. All worship is not acceptable to God.

One greatly mistakes who comes to the conclusion that all worship is acceptable to God. As misguided as Nadab and Abihu were in their act, theirs was, nevertheless, an act of worship. But it was an act of worship unacceptable to Jehovah. So, since we can be sure that we can worship God unacceptably, we should be all asking the question, "*How do we worship God acceptably today?*" Consider with me the following:

a) The character of the worshiper is a factor.

The numerous instructions in the law of Moses that relate to personal purity shows us the great importance that God places on the character of worshipers. The Israelites were to be worshipers of God. But first they were to be pure, for God can have no association with darkness. We sometimes forget that soundness of the inward life is a pre-requisite to acceptable worship. We conclude, too easily I think, that if a man observes the formalities of public worship, his spiritual condition is correct. But please be advised that it is not always so. And while we may fool man, God will not be mocked. Our character must be pleasing to God if any act of worship will be accepted by Him (**Matt. 5:23,24**). The character of Nadab and Abihu was lacking. They didn't have the proper respect for God. Thus, they could never be acceptable worshipers of God; nor can we if our character isn't what it ought to be.

b) The purpose of worship is a factor.

Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire. Why we cannot be certain. It may have been in obedience to some selfish end. It may have been an attempt to secure for themselves a reputation. Or it could have been an attempt to please the crowd. But there is one thing about which we can be sure -- their purpose was less than pure and their motive was less than honorable. That kind of worship can never please God, even if all else is right. Motives always matter to God (**Jn. 6:65,66; Phil. 1:15,16; 1 Cor. 13:1-3**).

i) Preaching is an act of worship.

But when a preacher demonstrates extravagances of manner to impress men and become famous, he is offering strange fire. The purpose of preaching is to win souls, glorify God and edify man. Any other motive is displeasing to God.

ii) Teaching a Bible class is an act of worship.

But when a Bible class teacher teaches only that which will tickle the

ear of the audience, so not to become unpopular with the people, that teacher is offering strange fire.

iii) Singing is an act of worship.

But when one sings without knowing what he is singing and concentrating on the words sung, or if one sings just to be heard or to show-off, that person is offering strange fire.

iv) Attending services involves worship.

But we must ask the question, "*Why are we here?*" If we are here to be entertained. If we are here simply by force of habit. If we are here just to please man (satisfy parents, spouse, etc.), we are offering strange fire.

So, you get the point. Why we worship God is a factor in determining whether or not our efforts are acceptable by Him.

c) The mode of worship is a factor.

Nadab and Abihu were punished for departing from the divinely established order of service. We must learn the lesson. If we depart from God's word, our worship will be rejected (**Matt. 15:7-9**). We must, as Jesus said, worship God in spirit and in truth (**Jn. 4:24**). What God has told us specifically to do, we must do; no more, no less (e.g of Lord's supper).

d) Preparation for worship is a factor.

Now, let me say a little something about preparation for worship. We ought to be at our best when we approach the place and hour of worship. We should not turn to it in a moment's notice. We know when we are going to gather ourselves together for worship. The first day of the week is the appointed time. We should be mentally and emotionally prepared for it. Worship should be the highlight of our week. Indeed every day we should conduct ourselves in such a way that we are prepared to offer acceptable worship. Paul said, "*Pray without ceasing.*" But we cannot offer the sacrifice of prayer unless our lives are prepared. We must give God our best in the spiritual sacrifices that we offer Him (**Mal. 1:6-9**). Listen to me: when we give our best at school, and we give our all on our jobs, and then turn around and give God less than our best because of a lack of preparation, we dishonor our heavenly Father.

So, what have we said about worship? We've said that it is possible worship God in an unacceptable fashion. And if we are going to worship God acceptably, character, purpose, mode and preparation are all important factors.

II. Ministers of God can fall short.

Nadab and Abihu were consecrated to the priestly office. They would engage in services that should have stimulated them to good works. It was reasonable to expect that while their inauguration was fresh on their minds that they would magnify their office. But they did not. Instead of glorifying God they insulted Him to His face. In less than 24 hours they had fallen. Such has been the case with many in the body of Christ today, and I speak particularly of those who occupy the role of preacher. Preachers are not perfect. And certainly they should not be esteemed as such (**1 Cor. 3:4-9**). And let me suggest that the problem is not that many preachers exalt themselves, though at times this happens; the problem is that preachers are being too highly thought of by man. Listen: I want your respect, and you should respect the position that I hold. The minister does have some delegated authority. He has been commanded to preach, reprove, rebuke, and to set in order things that are lacking in the local church. The preacher, then, has the authority to do those things, and you must respect that. But don't over-exalt the preacher. Don't think he cannot make mistakes. Don't think he cannot fall, and if he does fall, don't accept him in his fallen state.

III. Those with godly parents can fall.

Aaron, the famous father of Nadab and Abihu, found favor with God. His sacrifice was readily accepted by God. One might think that the sons of Aaron should have been pardoned on bases of their relation to Aaron. But not so! Or one might have thought that the piety of Aaron would have rubbed off on these two boys, but again that wasn't the case. In spite of their godly father, Nadab and Abihu turned out wrong. Now, that should teach a lesson to two groups:

A. Children with godly parents.

Acceptability with God is based on your own conduct, not the conduct of your parents (**Ez. 18:19,20; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 5:6**).

B. Godly parents.

Train your children. Don't just assume that they are going to be like you. Teach them to serve and respect God.

IV. We must respect the silence of God's Word.

Sin after sin is committed by religious people because they have a wrong idea about the silence of God's Word, i.e., about what the Bible does not say. They think that if the Bible doesn't specifically condemn a thing then that thing is authorized. Nadab and Abihu thought something like that. As we said earlier, they tried to offer an offering at an unauthorized time and they used unauthorized fire. But nowhere, and listen carefully, nowhere did God ever specifically condemn what they did. In fact, as far as where the fire was to be taken from, God didn't reveal His will until after the death of these two young priests. And so wherein did they sin? They sinned by

doing something about which God said nothing. When God is silent, that does not authorize a thing, it automatically makes it unauthorized (**Heb. 7:14**). So then, we must all respect the silence of the scriptures. Let's briefly apply this truth:

- A. **God said nothing in N.T. about musical instruments.** Does that authorize their use, or make them unauthorized?
- B. **God said nothing about the church being involved in business.** Does that authorize that, or make it unauthorized?
- C. **God said nothing about the church sponsoring recreational activities.** Does that authorize those kind of activities, or make them unauthorized?

V. **Sin must be punished.**

The record said, "*And there went out fire from the Lord.*" Fire was their sin, and fire was their punishment. "*They died before the Lord,*" so that all the people knew that sin would not be ignored by God. Can you imagine the fear that befell the people as they watched the men of Moses carried these two fallen priest out of the camp. Their bodies burned by the fire of God. The stench of their scorched flesh still, no doubt, very much present in the air. If the people didn't learn anything else, they learned that "*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" And may I say to you that the happenings of that day should lie on our hearts and be planted in our minds as if they transpired yesterday. Are they not recorded for our instruction? (**Rom. 15:4**). God is the same. His attitude towards sin hasn't changed one wit. The only difference is that the punishment for unrepented sin is deferred until death, and instead of earthly and material fire, those who mock God will be exposed to n eternal fire of hell (**2 Thess. 1:8,9; Rev. 20:11-15**).

CONCLUSION:

These are just some of the lessons that we learn from Nadab and Abihu. Let's make application where we can.