

SEPARATION

Leviticus 9:15-24; 10:1-3

If you were challenged to pick out one word or one phrase to describe the church in today's world, what would be the most prominent characteristic or best description of the church? The answers might include such words as saved, cold, losing influence, effective, growing, caring, friendly, helpful, ineffective, etc. Most of the times when this exercise is done, very few people will include the word "holy" as the most prominent characteristic. Some may venture to include the word "saints" which has essentially the same meaning as holy.

Most Christians are very reluctant to refer to themselves as "saints" or to think of their lives as being holy, and yet eight times in the Scriptures those who identify themselves as belonging to God are admonished (commanded) "Be holy for I am holy."

I think we can understand why we don't routinely tell others that we are "saints" and that we are "holy" because people just don't understand the basic meaning of these words and they would think we were being boastful or out of touch with reality. On the other hand, it is important for us to realize that being saints (holy) is exactly what God wants for us and He is working in us to make that an outward reality in our lives.

Since 90 percent of what we do is controlled by our unconscious or automatic brains rather than our conscious brains, then we behave according to the beliefs that we have of who we really are. While you may not tell your neighbor that you are holy and that you are a saint, you need to be telling yourself that all the time. Your automatic or unconscious brain is somewhat simple in that it will believe "whatever you tell it" and you will "automatically" act to express or act out the imbedded thoughts and precepts that you have adopted.

How can we develop the "correct" self-image so that our minds will be transformed to agree with what God has declared to be His will for us? As we study passages from the Book of Leviticus which can be characterized as the "Israelites' handbook on holiness," we will look for actions and attitudes that will help us in our walk with the Lord. God's desire for Israel was that they were to be a special people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). Under the Old Covenant, God's people *had* a priesthood; under the New Covenant, God's people *are* a "holy priesthood" and a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

According to Warren Wiersbe in his book *Be Holy*, Leviticus 8-10 describes the eight-day ordination ceremony for the high priest Aaron and his sons. As God's chosen priests, they had to accept three solemn responsibilities: submitting to God's authority (chap. 8), revealing God's glory (chap. 9), and accepting God's discipline (chap. 10).

Based on what we just read, the reason we are "set apart" (declared to be holy) is to carry out priestly duties. In the Israelite culture, the priests were limited to the male descendants of Aaron. In the church the only limitation is being a born-again child of God. To help Aaron and his sons realize the change in their status from being Levites to being priest, there was an elaborate ordination ceremony. We will not do a detailed study of all that this entailed but will simply mention the major points so that we can think about what these might mean for us in the church who are individually priests unto God.

God insisted that the priests be holy men, set apart for His service alone in a ceremony that involved their being bathed in water and marked by oil and blood. The high priest was anointed with special oil. The priests wore special garments, and special laws that didn't apply to the common people governed their lives. In every way, the priests demonstrated the fact that they were set apart and therefore holy to the Lord. In addition to these requirements there were special sacrifices associated with the ordination of the priests. These offerings were a bull for a

sin offering, one ram for the burnt offering, another ram for a consecration offering and the grain offering of a basket of unleavened bread.

We need to just touch briefly on the various parts of the ceremony and how these are related to us as Christians. The application of the blood can be related to the shed blood of Christ which is applied to us for consecration, the anointing oil points to the anointing of each of us by the Spirit of God and being bathed in water is a call for purity.

The special garments included a tunic, girdle, head dress, and breastplate. Do we (as Christians) have special garments? It may be a stretch to say that each of us as priests unto God are to put on special spiritual clothing. We could call the items of our special clothing “the whole armor of God.” This wardrobe would include these articles mentioned here plus shoes and a shield since part of the ministry we have is to also carry out the duty of a soldier.

We also see that the priests were to observe special rules that did not apply to those who were not set apart for priestly duties. Because we are commissioned by God to be priests then we should screen our behavior with questions such as the following: *Does this violate any principle of Scripture? Does this take the keen edge off my spiritual life? Can I ask the Lord's blessing on this? Would this make a fellow Christian stumble? Can I do this knowing that Christ is resident in me?*

Our tendency might be to conclude that if we have (1) submitted to God's authority, (2) if our lives are radiating the glory of God from within, and (3) if we accept God's discipline, then what else is there? Once the qualifications and ordinations are addressed we need to realize that “the work has just begun.” What is the work of being a priest? Since the physical process and events in the Old Testament point to spiritual truth for us in the church, we can learn from what the priests did in Israel and discover what our “priestly” ministry should be in the church.

Following the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests, they then began to minister on behalf of the people as the Scripture text tells us at the beginning of chapter nine. The first thing that Aaron needed to do was to take appropriate animals for a sin offering and burnt offering for himself and his sons and carry out the offerings to God so that their dedication and atonement were addressed before they began to minister to the people. The priests carried out these offerings every day in the morning and the evening.

In the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament we are reminded that the new priesthood based on Christ as our High Priest is different. As our High Priest, He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day, as (Aaronic) high priests did – first for their own sins, then for those of the people. He did this once for all when He offered Himself (Heb 7:27). As Christ's representatives and priest unto God in this new order of priests, we rely on the completed work of Christ on the cross and our identity with Him (That would correspond to the Burnt offering). Our preparedness with regard to sin would be related to what we see in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

Separated – 9:15-21

¹⁵ Then he presented the people's offering, and took the goat of the sin offering which was for the people, and slaughtered it and offered it for sin, like the first. ¹⁶ He also presented the burnt offering, and offered it according to the ordinance. ¹⁷ Next he presented the grain offering, and filled his hand with some of it and offered *it* up in smoke on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning. ¹⁸ Then he slaughtered the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings which was for the people; and Aaron's sons handed the blood to him and he sprinkled it around on the altar. ¹⁹ As for the portions of fat from the ox and from the ram, the fat tail, and the *fat* covering, and the kidneys and the lobe of the liver, ²⁰ they now placed the portions of fat on the breasts; and he offered them up in smoke on the altar. ²¹ But the breasts and the right thigh Aaron presented as a wave offering before the LORD, just as Moses

had commanded. Leviticus 9:15-21 (NASB95)

When Aaron had completed all these sacrifices, he and his sons and the people of Israel were forgiven, dedicated wholly to the Lord and in fellowship with Him. The order of the sacrifices is significant: We must first deal with our sins before we can dedicate ourselves totally to the Lord; then we can enjoy fellowship with Him.

The offerings that Aaron and his sons carried out on behalf of the people began with the same kind of offering that had been done for themselves. The first issue addressed was sins (sin offering). If we are to minister on behalf of “the people,” the main concern for them should be their salvation. This should remind us of the Great Commission and the words of Christ that we are to be His witnesses. The starting point in coming to God is repentance. This is just logical in that a person who is running away from God in rebellion and sin must first stop and turn around before he or she can find salvation.

The next offering for the people was the burnt offering which represented as making a total commitment to the Lord by having everything of this sacrifice consumed in the fire. This offering points us initially to the cross of Christ in which He gave His all for our sins. It also points, in a continuing manner, to our presenting ourselves to God as an ongoing living sacrifice as Paul mentioned in Romans 12:1.

In addition to these two offerings that were like the ordination and dedication offerings of the priests, there were additional offerings made for the people and these were examples of free-will offerings that the people would continue to make at times of their choosing or for special occasions. The grain offering was mentioned here. This offering was offered as “unto the Lord” but typically was for the benefit of the priest. A token portion was placed in the fire of other offerings that were burned on the altar.

Also, we see mention of the peace or fellowship offering directed toward God to affirm a good relationship that we have with Him and directed toward others in that it was inclusive since part of this offering was given to the family making the offering and they shared it with everyone in their household (family and servants), the poor in their community and the Levites who lived nearby. This initial offering described here was done by Aaron and his sons on behalf of the people. After this time, the people would do this as a freewill offering that was carried out as an expression of thanksgiving, a celebration of a special occasion, and any other excuse for affirming peace with God and caring for others.

The part of this offering that was not burned in the fire and not given to the family making the offer was the “breast and the right thigh.” We see here that these portions were presented as a wave offering (a solemn presentation) unto the Lord and after literally being “held up in the air” the meat was given to the priests for their use.

What might we (as Christians) do as priests that would be like the sin, burnt and peace offerings that Aaron and his sons did for the Israelites in the physical realm? We find “spiritual sacrifices” mentioned in 1 Peter 2:5: we are “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Just as spiritual warfare is effectively waged in the prayer closet, we might look there for a way to make “spiritual sacrifices” for others. We are told in James 5:16 that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. We should certainly be praying for those who are living in sin, praying for those who should be presenting their lives to the Lord in total commitment and for praying regarding the times that we have interactions with the lost that our fellowship with them would help draw them to God through Christ.

Offering Accepted – 9:22-24

²² Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. Leviticus 9:22-24 (NASB95)

After the sacrifices were offered up for the people, Aaron blessed the people. The obvious lesson here for us is that after we have prayed for the lost world we need to be presenting Christ to the world in such a way that they are drawn to Him and not repelled by us. Our speech certainly needs to be seasoned with graciousness. The purpose of our witness and our interaction with the “world that is lost” is to bring conviction rather than condemnation. Going all the way back to the promise that God made to Abraham, we see that God blessed him so that he and his descendants would be a blessing to the world. As the church, we need to see ourselves as those who have the faith of Abraham and are thus counted as his seed and realize that we are blessed so that we may be a blessing to others.

After Moses and Aaron came out of the tent of meeting, they again blessed the people and the Lord showed His approval and acceptance by manifesting His glory so that all those who were gathered there could see it. Following that, fire from the Lord consumed the portions of the sacrifice that remained on the altar. Needless to say, this awesome display of glory and power brought them to their faces before the Lord which was the posture of worship.

As we pray for people and God intervenes on their behalf in an unambiguous way, then we would expect them to have an experience of sensing the awesome presence of God that would be life changing.

Holiness Seen – 10:1-3

¹ 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. ² And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ 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.’ ” So Aaron, therefore, kept silent. Leviticus 10:1-3 (NASB95)

Behold the goodness and the severity of the Lord. The same awesomeness and consuming fire that affirmed the offerings made on behalf of the people was also capable of eliminating those who would ignore the commandments and conduct themselves in a way that was contrary to the nature and character of YHWH. The meaning of “strange fire” is not clear but would seem to indicate that its source was not from the Lord and probably was fire that did not come from the altar where sacrifices had been made.

Fire from the altar was to be placed in censers and incense was placed on that as part of what was to happen at the Altar of Incense that was in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Another problem was that Aaron was to be the one who did the incense offering and not just any ordinary priest. A third possibility was that the offering was actually taken behind the veil into the Holy of Holies and that was very serious.

God’s requirement was that those who come near to Him must treat Him as being Holy and His expectation was to be honored by all the people. Those who do so will be blessed and those who disregard or disrespect God will suffer the consequences. It doesn’t take a genius to understand the saying “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”