

## **The Danger of Presumption Leviticus 10**

We will be in Leviticus 10 this morning and what we see today will be a drastic turn of events from what we saw last week, and I want to help us understand what happened and how it relates to our lives today.

To begin I want you to think about the Parable of the Prodigal Son – (picture) one of the most beloved parables in the Bible. In this story there is an ancient Israelite father with two sons. The father is the head of a large estate and one day his youngest son says he wants his share of the inheritance which the father graciously gives him. The son leaves home with his newly acquired wealth and goes to the city where he squanders it all on reckless living. At one point he's so poor and destitute that he comes to his senses and decides to go back home and seek his father's mercy – if he could just become one of his servants it would be far better than his current situation. So he goes back and his father runs out to meet him and welcomes him with the full blessings of a son, and throws a great celebration.

We love that story because we relate to the son and it helps us see how deeply God loves us. But I want us to think about a new twist: What if, after the big celebration the son started thinking, “Well that worked out pretty well, I got to go off and have my fun and then come back as if nothing happened. I think I'll go do it again.”?

I would call that an attitude of presumption. Instead of being thankful for his father's mercy and acting like a forgiven son should, he presumed upon his father's love by trying to take advantage of him and get away with raucous living. What would happen if he did that? What would the father do? What would God do if that was us?

I think there's some confusion among Christians when it comes to this kind of situation. Unfortunately we see something like this play out all too often. Someone hears the message about Jesus' death on the cross and God's forgiveness of sins – all they have to do is believe... So they do and it seems like they've become a Christian. They decide to believe in Jesus so they can receive forgiveness and eternal life, but nothing really changes in their life, or at least not long term. They go back to their sinful lifestyle, only now, they believe they're forgiven and going to heaven. They've taken the good news of

Christ's sacrifice and God's free gift of mercy, grace, and forgiveness and turned it into a license for sinful living. This is an attitude of presumption. How does God feel about these things?

The story we're going to look at today is going to be a little troubling after what we saw last week, but very important for helping us think biblically about these things. As we dig into the details and see what was really going on, things will begin to make sense and it will show us the great danger of presumption.

Last week we saw an incredibly important event take place in Israel's history – the inauguration of the priests and sacrifices in the tabernacle. Everything in Exodus and Leviticus was leading up to that day, and on that day, after all the sacrifices were offered, the glory of Yahweh appeared – his holy fire came out and burned up the sacrifices and his blessing poured out over the people. It was a powerful expression of his desire to dwell with and be near and bless his people. But then we get to chapter 10. This is what happened right after that...

Read Leviticus 10:1-7

*Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.*

*<sup>4</sup> And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near; carry your brothers away from the front of the sanctuary and out of the camp." <sup>5</sup> So they came near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. <sup>6</sup> And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar his sons, "Do not let the hair of your heads hang loose, and do not tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the congregation; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning that the Lord has kindled. <sup>7</sup> And do not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.*

There couldn't be a more drastic turn of events than this. And reading this can be really confusing, especially considering what happened earlier when God was pouring out blessing on the people. It seems like God's mood completely flips over a minor thing. How could he go from pouring out blessing to pouring out fire and killing two of the priests and then not allowing their father and brothers to mourn for them? Their dead bodies were carried out in front of all the people and their joy turned to wailing. So this seems to ruin all the good feelings from chapter 9 and make you wonder what happened to the love of God being expressed there?

Let's take a look at what was going on. First, I want us to see the commands God gave to Moses in Exodus 30 related to this incident.

Read Exodus 30:1, 6-10.

*You shall make an altar on which to burn incense... (description of altar) <sup>6</sup>And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you. <sup>7</sup>And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, <sup>8</sup>and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. <sup>9</sup>You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. <sup>10</sup>Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the Lord.*

(Picture) This altar was right in the middle of the tabernacle, directly in front of the entrance to the Holy of Holies. This was the last object the high priest would encounter before entering the Holy of Holies and it was "most holy to the Lord," reserved for very specific use only by the high priest. No one else was to touch it or burn incense on it. So when you saw the altar of incense, you knew you were on holy ground and great care must be taken to follow the commands of Yahweh.

On the day that Nadab and Abihu died, it says that they "*offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them.*" It also says that their dead bodies had to be carried away "*from the front of the sanctuary.*" That means they were burning incense at the altar of incense, which they had been expressly forbidden to do. For some reason

they decided they were going to do this, even though it was forbidden. After being through 7 days of ordination, knowing that if they left the courtyard they would die, and after witnessing the glory of Yahweh that day along with his holy fire that consumed the sacrifices, they would have been well aware of how carefully they needed to follow all of Yahweh's instructions. These things were to be treated with utmost reverence.

But they disobeyed Yahweh. Why would they do that? There is some indication in Leviticus 10:8-9 that they may have consumed too much wine in the drink offerings and were drunk, which would have been another serious problem. But I also wonder if, upon seeing the favor of the Lord expressed to his people after the sacrifices that day, they put their guard down and felt like they were free to offer incense how they wanted to, even if it violated Yahweh's clear instructions?

When God spoke to Moses about their offense, he said "*Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified,*" indicating that Nadab and Abihu had done the opposite. They had treated Yahweh as unholy and dishonored him before the people. They acted like neither he, nor his commands, nor his holiness was a big deal. So I see an attitude of presumption. They presumed upon the mercy of Yahweh that they had just experienced and took the liberty to do what they wanted to do, even though it violated God's commands. And they obviously thought they would be just fine when they appeared before him in his holy sanctuary. They were wrong. They were consumed by his holy fire. I'm picturing something like a lightning strike.

King Saul did the same thing when he disobeyed a direct command of God and took spoil from his victory over the Amalekites. His excuse was that he kept some of the best things so that he could make sacrifices to the Lord. He thought that in the face of God's favor in battle, he could do what he wanted to do even if that meant disobeying God's command, much like Nadab and Abihu did. This is what the prophet Samuel said in response to him in 1 Samuel 15:22-23: "*Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.* <sup>23</sup> *For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.*" Presumption is as iniquity and idolatry... and Saul paid a heavy price.

What does the sin of presumption look like today? It looks like a person who comes to understand and believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for their sins and that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. But at some point they begin to see and believe and live like that gospel gives them the freedom to live in sin. “If salvation is by grace through faith, and apart from works, then I can do whatever I want to do.” That is presumption. And it’s a dangerous place to be – just as dangerous as Nadab and Abihu.

Many early Christians began thinking that way about the gospel. Having been set free from the weight of the law and guilt of sin they thought they could live in disobedience and it wouldn’t matter. But the apostles confronted that false teaching. Hebrews 10:26-31 says: *“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,<sup>27</sup> but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.<sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.<sup>29</sup> How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?<sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”<sup>31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

To go on deliberately sinning after coming to a knowledge of the truth is seen by God as trampling Jesus underfoot and profaning the blood of his sacrifice that washes away our sins.

Paul gives a similar warning in Romans 2:1-5: *“Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same [sinful] things.<sup>2</sup> We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.<sup>3</sup> Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?<sup>4</sup> Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?<sup>5</sup> But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”*

Paul confronted their presumption and made it clear that God's kindness toward us in Jesus is meant to lead us to repentance, never presumption. An attitude of presumption indicates a faith that is flawed and powerless to save anyone on the day of judgment. It doesn't come from God. True faith that is born of the Spirit and springs from a new heart and new spirit will always bear the fruit of repentance. That doesn't mean sinless perfection, but it does mean pursuing obedience and righteousness, which is exactly the opposite of presumption.

So if the Prodigal Son responded to his father's mercy by taking advantage of that mercy and deliberately going back to a lifestyle of sin, I think he would face fearful judgment. If Pastor Eric ignores God's commands and deliberately chooses to live a lifestyle of sin because I somehow think that Jesus' blood gives me the freedom to do so without eternal consequence, I will face a fury of fire when I stand before Yahweh someday.

We have seen both the love of God and the holiness of God in these two chapters of Leviticus, and as wonderful and consuming as his love is, it does not nullify his holiness. It does not give us permission to be indifferent toward our sin. God's love assures us that when we do sin, we have an advocate and our sins are forgiven, but his holiness reminds us that it would be foolish to treat our sin lightly or deliberately go after it or tolerate it in our lives. The love of God compels us to confess our sins and seek to live our lives in devotion to the one who died for our sins.

As we go into a time of communion, I hope that we will rightly experience both the love of God and the holiness of God, that we will rejoice in adoration and bow in reverence. What a privilege we have to be called sons and daughters of God and receive blessing upon blessing forevermore as his beloved children. Let us never take these things for granted but joyfully offer ourselves completely to him.