

## Sanctification And Holiness (Part 4)

What God Will Accept

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 11-Aug-01; Sermon #515

As the last sermon in this series ended, it was becoming clearer with each verse that God wants things done exactly as He stipulates, and that this peculiar term—*sanctification* or *setting apart*—plays a major role in the "who" and the "what" particulars of His stipulations.

Is this peculiar at all to you because God would want things done in a certain way? Do not you ladies do the same thing in regard to recipes? Do you not use certain spices and herbs, and *only* those spices and herbs while preparing a certain dish? What do you think it is that gives Chinese food and Mexican food and Italian food their distinctive flavors? It is because certain basic herbs and spices are *sanctified* for their recipe. If those flavors are removed, it does not turn out to be what you intended it to be. It is those peculiar particular sanctified things that produce the flavor that you want and desire to have.

We are going to begin in Revelation 22 because a simple application regarding a recipe is right in harmony with the reason why God wants things done in certain ways, and why He stipulates so specifically what and how He wants them done.

**Revelation 22:17-19** And the Spirit and the bride say, Come, And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. For I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

The final warning of the entire Bible is that we not change what He has said. This warning is straight-forward and clear, and I do not see how it can be misunderstood. Perhaps one might argue that it only pertains to what is said in the book of Revelation, because it says "The words of this prophecy." But of people who might make such a narrow interpretation as this to apply only to the book of Revelation, thinking that God is thus permitting other portions of His Word in other contexts to be altered unless He gives a similar warning, are we just free to tear things apart and do things as we might want to do? Well, that is utter nonsense.

**Deuteronomy 4:1-2** Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers gives you. You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish ought from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

We are already beginning to see that things He said there in Revelation 22 are not limited to Revelation 22. The same principle is held to be true, commanded here in Deuteronomy 4.

**Deuteronomy 12:29-32** When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations from before you, whither you go to possess them, and you succeed them, and dwell in their land; Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before you: and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

Again, it is very clear, is it not?

**Joshua 1:7-8** Only be you strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded you: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper whithersoever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

**Proverbs 30:5-6** Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add you not unto his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar.

Do not human parents do the same thing during instruction to their children? Now why? In the last two verses—in Joshua 1:7-8, and now here in Proverbs 30:5-6—two very closely-related reasons are given. In Joshua He says, "Follow exactly what I say in order that you might have good success." In the book of Proverbs He says, "Don't add to or take away from My word, because I am a *shield* unto you." In other words, "If you do it My way, you are going to be protected." On the one hand, if we do it His way, there is protection from harm. On the other hand, if we do it exactly the way He says, we will have good success. I am sure that everybody wants that in life.

I am sure that any parent wants that in the lives of his children as well, and so you tell your children, "Do it this way." Let us say that it pertains to something that is potentially dangerous, like going to school, and maybe the child has to walk a certain way to school. You say, "I want you to walk down this street. I want you to make a right turn on that street. I want you to wait until the traffic signal turns green, or the safety guard says it is safe for you to come across. I want you to obey my instructions, because I want you to get to school, and I want you to be able to come home."

That is the principle that is involved here. We want success, and that is the way to have success, to not add to nor take away from God's Word, and it will come.

God is looking out for our best interest, but human nature's tendency is to get defensive and to think that God is holding out on us, that He is keeping us

from fun, that He just wants to control us, and that rubs the fur on the cat the wrong way. But do you know what? This is exactly the kind of ploy that Satan used on Adam and Eve. "Oh, has God said . . .?" You see, he was implying that God was holding out on them. "If you do it this way, you're going to become gods."

You see, Satan did not give them the whole picture, and so they violated, I am sure, what is God's basic instruction to anybody: "Do it the way I tell you. Don't add to it. Don't take away, because I want it to be well with you. I want you to have success, and I don't want you to get hurt. If you do it My way, it's going to protect you in everything that you do."

Every discipline that I know of has rules, laws, orders, policies, recipes, formulas, methods, techniques, and procedures. Call them what you will, the purpose is always the same—so that things work out well. God is not being arbitrary. He is not being overly strict, and He is not harsh in His requirements. As we have been seeing as we have been going through Numbers 16 through 18, that is what He is giving the directions there for, and that is why He responded in the way that He did, because His stipulations were not being followed.

What we are dealing with are areas of life where trust and the fear of God actively come into play, because the whys of specific matters of God's Word are often hidden from our clear view, and there is a questioning hesitancy within us against submitting until we have all the answers. "I'm not going to submit until I *see*!" Uh oh! Faith and seeing are not always compatible are they, especially with God?

As that sermon closed, I arrived at what I feel is a critical question for us posed in the record of the particular rebellion that we have been looking into there in Numbers 16 through 18.

Now since God is not responding and interacting with us in such dramatic fashion as He did with them then, there is therefore much greater demand from Him in regard to trust and the fear of God. Is there then enough spiritual fear and faith in us to accept the knowledge, understand its application, and submit in faith to do what we have been set apart for? There is the critical point.

Just in case we still do not get the lesson yet of the importance of sanctification by God, we are not finished with Numbers 16 through 18. In fact we have just been skimming along a little bit under the surface. Maybe a little bit deeper than just under the surface. There is more yet to come. We are going to go back through, in thought, and also in more detail, some of the things that we skipped over earlier.

**Numbers 16:36-40** And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter you the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel. And Eleazar the priest took the brazen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar; to be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.

It says very clearly in those four or five verses that the censers used by the rebels were holy. But even though it is not directly mentioned, the implication is that the fire used was not holy because of the way that it was treated. "Take it out there and scatter it," He said. We are going to review this because the activity that is commanded here involving the censer and the fire in this episode, when combined with the death of Aaron's sons in Leviticus 10:1, has important bearing toward understanding the requirements of holiness and the use of holy things.

**Leviticus 10:1** And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.

There are at least four Hebrew words that are translated into the English words profane, strange, stranger, alien, heathen, or foreigner. Those four

Hebrew words might be translated into any one of those five English words. It is interesting that two of those Hebrew words can even be translated into the English word "adultery." Every one of those four Hebrew words all tend to indicate a deficient quality in a relationship, or a deficient comparison in relation to an ideal or a standard.

**Proverbs 5:3** For the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil.

**Proverbs 5:20** And why will you, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?

This adulterous woman is referred to as "strange"—as a *strange* woman. Most modern translations will translate that word "strange" in verse 3, or "strange" in verse 20, as "immoral." You can see then that an immoral person—a *strange* person—is someone who does not measure up to an ideal. They are immoral. In this context then you have to be led to understand that the implication is that the woman is adulterous. That is why on occasion this word will be translated into "adultery," because it is clearly indicated by the context. The immorality that is shown there is adultery.

The woman here in this context, in verses 3 and 20, does not qualify to meet the standard or ideal of one's wife. Conversely, one of those words in verse 20 is translated "stranger," and in modern translations it is translated "foreigner." These words are all related, but you can see that there are quite a number of applications that the translators can make all from the same words and translate it into English in a way that they think—and probably in most cases they are right—fits the context.

Let us go back again to Numbers 16:40. As we read this I want you to think of the woman in Proverbs 5:20. The application is that she did not measure up to an ideal. She did not measure up to a standard.

**Numbers 16:40** To be a memorial unto the children of Israel that no stranger which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.

The first thing that becomes clear is this: What tribe was Korah of? He was a Levite. What tribe was Dathan of? He was a Levite. But they were not of the family of *Aaron*. Aaron was a Levite, but he was not of the same family as Korah and Dathan. What this means is that a Levite not of the family of Aaron was a holy person in one regard because he had made the covenant with God. Therefore, he was sanctified; he was set apart. He was holy in a second regard in that because he was a Levite he was therefore able to serve the family of Aaron in the vicinity of the Tabernacle and Temple.

They were holy in two different regards, but they were a "*stranger*" when it came to doing to work of a priest. They were not qualified. They were not authentic, and therefore they were not recognized. And so a person then (and you have to be aware of this when you are studying the Bible) could be at one and the same time both "holy" and "strange," depending on what they are doing.

The "strange" woman back there in Proverbs 5 could have been an Israelite and therefore was holy in that regard, but she was a "strange woman" when it came in regard to qualifying as a moral wife. You have to be aware of that when you read these words of what God is trying to get across.

So if a Levite attempts to perform the office of a priest, he then can be referred to as "a stranger" while attempting to carry out the priest's responsibilities. His "setting apart" does not qualify him for that responsibility. He is not *authentic*. We are getting to some key words here. In the eyes of God he is not authentic. He does not measure up to the standard, and is therefore not recognized.

Do you not say in your own life that if you do not recognize somebody, that person is a stranger? That is exactly what God is saying here. They are not authentic. They are not recognized as qualified to operate in that position. In that case then a Levite is both holy and a stranger at one and the same time depending on what he is doing, even though he is Israelitish. Something "strange" or "a stranger" is one who is not recognized by God, and is therefore unacceptable because they do not meet the criteria that God has established. It is that simple.

We are going to go now to Exodus 12 and continue to chase this out.

**Exodus 12:43-45** And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and a hired servant shall not eat thereof.

**Exodus 12:48-49** And when a stranger shall sojourn with you and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourns among you.

Let us chase this out. An Israelite was **not** a part of Israel—the whole community—merely by being born. What had to be done? The baby boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day, *then* he became a part of Israel. Now a *stranger* (in this case a *non*-Israelite, and Israel always had non-Israelites living within their tribes even as we do today), as long as he was not circumcised, was expressly forbidden to take the Passover, which symbolizes the acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the subsequent *eating* of Him. Why? Because he is not holy. He is strange. He is profane. He is not recognized. He is not qualified. He is not acceptable to partake.

However, when a stranger became circumcised, things dramatically changed. Circumcision represents, it symbolizes, belief in the blood of Jesus Christ and repentance. In other words, it represents conversion. Now the stranger is holy. Now he meets the qualifications. God recognizes him as authentic, and free to participate fully in Israel's community life; but at the same time he is still a stranger in terms of being a non-Israelite by birth.

This word is a little bit complicated, but the key to understanding this is to recognize "authentic"—what God sees as being *authentic*—and meeting the criteria that He established.

We are just following this through, and by the time we are done with this sermon today I hope you really get the point in regard to the offerings that are made to God, including the Pentecost offering, or including the



Wavesheaf offering. It has to meet the criteria or it is not authentic. God will not recognize it. God will not accept it.

Let us go now to Matthew 22, because Jesus makes a very interesting use of this.

**Matthew 22:9-13** Go you therefore into the highways, and as many as you shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he said unto him, Friend, how came you in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. [He had nothing to say. He had no defense.] Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This of course takes place within the context of the marriage feast. The man was rejected because he was not acceptable because he was not wearing the proper clothing. He was not wearing clothing that was authentic and recognized by the host for that occasion. He was invited. He appeared, but he left out an important detail. He did not wear *holy* clothing. His clothing was *strange, profane, unacceptable*.

**Revelation 19:8** And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness [or the good works] of the saints.

There is a seemingly small but important something hidden here that is drawn from Jewish culture of Jesus' day. In a way we are all familiar with it—at least that part which says that the *fine linen* represents the righteous acts of the saints. But in that period of time—the time that Jesus spoke this—whenever a king had a marriage feast, the king, as host, supplied the guests with the garments that were to be worn while in attendance at the marriage feast. Thus the ejected man in Jesus' parable rejected (in this case in Matthew 22) God's provision. Symbolically, he preferred his own righteousness to God's.

We are coming to an important principle here, because what this parable shows is that only God's righteousness is recognizable and acceptable to God. A man's own righteousness is not holy. The very interesting and important principle here is that only that which God has designated as holy, and only that which therefore has its *source* in God, is acceptable to God. Mull that one over for awhile.

This is what we are dealing with in Numbers 16. In other words, He will only accept that which He has given in the first place as an offering to Him. We can only give back to Him as holy that which He has first given to us. It is the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit, and *that* is a love He will accept back because He is getting back his own—that which He gave to us in the first place. This same principle applies to offerings as well. We can only give back to Him what He has first given to us.

Are you beginning to see why the giving of produce from pagan fields is not acceptable to God? It is not holy.

I think that we can understand this if we look at it from a slightly different perspective. Can men make anything holy? Can men make a day holy? Now men can set apart a day, as they have done with Sunday, as they have done with Christmas and with Easter, but that does not mean that it is acceptable to God, because that day as a day of worship does not have its source in *Him*. It is not the day that He instructed us to keep. He clearly says that *He* made the Sabbath holy, and His festivals holy.

This world's Christianity has virtually ignored the laws of holiness by declaring that virtually anything goes in the worship of God, and that God will accept it in a spirit of magnanimity based upon what is in a person's heart, not even realizing that what is in their heart is an ignorant rebellion against His laws of holiness.

Now how magnanimously did God deal with Korah, and with Dathan, and with Abiram, even though they were holy to some degree because they had made the covenant with God and that both of them were Levites besides?

In our day, this world's Christians trample all over the day that He made holy, and then on the day that *they* have set apart, they ostensibly appear before Him in virtually any kind of clothing *they* deem as comfortable and acceptable rather than the clothing fit for appearance before the King of the universe. They sing songs that glorify men in the words and in the performance rather than God, and the whole service can often turn into an entertaining performance rather than the place given over to the upgrading of the glorification of the Creator. Instead of people being pointedly and graphically told about their sins, and the brilliant glory of our God's character and the standards, and how we must labor to grow into His image, they are given words of peace that essentially say, "You're a good kid. Just be a nice person."

We need to learn from this as well, for just because we are meeting in homes now rather than in rented halls is no justification for reducing our manner of dress, our conduct, or the conduct of our children. I hear occasionally of people eating and drinking during services.

When I went to school, and when Evelyn went to school, we were not even allowed to chew gum. I told a lot of people when I went to high school the worst thing that happened in four years of high school was that Irv Leitch threw a lighted cigarette into a waste paper basket full of wet hand-cloth towels and so forth. Some of them caught on fire, and there was smoke all over the place. I will tell you, we were not allowed to do anything in class. But what should the standard be when we are coming before the King of all creation?

I hear sometimes of children's permitted behavior in homes during services that their parents would never have stood for were they still meeting in halls, because other people would see their children's behavior, and they would be embarrassed by other people. But in the home the parents are persuaded that it is fair game to relax the standards. No, it is not. We are still before the same God.

Can we accept that by faith without Him having to use lightning bolts like He did with those people back in Numbers? Regardless, we are still meeting before the Creator, even as the New Testament shows that Christians in the

first century were also meeting in homes. What we are doing now is not a new practice. We are following through with what they did then. So do we respect Him and the day that He has made holy for fellowship with us?

Here is another thing. Some people go out to eat in restaurants virtually every Sabbath just like the world does on Sunday. I am not saying that it is wrong to ever go out on the Sabbath, that it should never be done; but if the world does something, should it not trigger something in our mind that maybe they are not doing it right, that what they are doing does not measure up, that it is *strange*, unacceptable to God?

Have you ever noticed—and I am sure you have, but let us review it—the respect that some of these men of God gave to God when they were in His presence? And they knew it. They knew they were in the presence of God. This is a lesson for you and me. Let us go back to Genesis 18. Here is Abraham, the father of the faithful.

**Genesis 18:1-2** And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day: And he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.

That translation really does not do it justice. Abraham was on his nose before the great Creator.

Turn now to Exodus 3:6 to the "burning bush" incident.

**Exodus 3:6** Moreover he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

He too had his face down in the dirt.

**Joshua 5:14** And he said, No; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth [That one gives justice to what Joshua did.], and did worship [Joshua showed

Him reverential respect], and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?

Let us go to one more in the book of Isaiah. We want this one simply because of Isaiah's response in terms of words.

**Isaiah 6:1-5** In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved to the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me [More literally correct it means "I am cursed!"], for I am undone! [Notice he pronounced the curse upon himself] because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: [Can you imagine Isaiah, as great as he was, a man of unclean lips? What must ours be like by comparison?] for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.

That phrase, "I am undone" literally means like I just read there in Matthew 22 where it says "the man was speechless." What Isaiah means here is that "I am guilty. I have no legitimate excuse for what I am."

Now God is not dealing with us in this manner. He is requiring of us that we deal with Him by faith, learning *what* we *should* do, and what our attitudes should be from these examples that we see of servants of His from the past. Understand this: God is not an informal pal. He is ***the Holy God*** ! Just to look on Him is enough to stop our human heart from beating.

We may think that God requires too much of us. We may think that He is unfair. We may think that He should reveal Himself to us in the same manner as He did to them. But brethren, there is nothing that I can do about it, and there is nothing that you can do about it except to accept what He has set as the way He is going to deal with us, and submit. He sets the standards, not us. Isaiah knew that. "I am undone!" he said.

Let us go back again to Leviticus 10 because we really have not left this. There was kind of a long digression there, but all of it is part of this thing about holiness, about sanctification, about *strange* things, about acceptable things, about profane things, about things that are authentic.

Now to Leviticus 10:1. "Strange" fire is fire that God did not know. "He did not recognize it as authentic," is the literal meaning. It was therefore profane. Now why?

**Leviticus 9:24** And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

Can you see it? The fire had its source in God. It was therefore the *only* fire that was acceptable in use to worship Him. It was the only fire that was acceptable for use in *service* to Him, to make an *offering* to Him. We can only give back what He has given to us as an acceptable offering.

**Leviticus 6:8-11** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering: It is the burnt offering, because of the burning upon the altar all night unto the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning in it. And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire has consumed with the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place.

Remember that. Remember He told them before there in Numbers 16:37 or 38 to just take it out there and scatter it. Now we see a change. It had to go to a *clean* place. Even the ashes from the fire had to be taken to a clean place.

**Leviticus 6:12-13** And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every

morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.

Are you getting the picture? Once God accepted the offering that was made in behalf of the priest during the consecration ceremonies that took place in Leviticus 9, when the fire came out from before the Lord and lit the wood underneath the offering that was on there, that fire was never allowed to go out. It had its source in God, and that fire had to be treated as if you were treating the Creator God. That fire came from Him, and it and *it* only was recognized and acceptable to Him.

That is one thing we can get from this. The second thing is that the priest even had to wear special clothing during the service of dumping the ashes, and then the ashes had to be taken to a *clean* place, not just any old dump. You do not treat even the ashes that come from the fire under God's altar as if they are common. They were *not* common. The ashes were *holy* ashes.

Now maybe I am judging my fellow Americans too strongly or something, but I feel that a typical reaction of any modern American would be: "What difference does it make whether I wear my Levis, my St. John's Bays, my Ralph Laurens, my Izods, or my Tommy Hilfigers? After all, those things cost me a lot of money, and I think I look pretty good in them, so I think that I'll just dump those ashes in the gutter over there."

There is a striking irony here when this is connected to the events of Numbers 16. The source of the fire that killed the 250 rebels was the same source as the fire that ignited the wood underneath the altar—the fire that those rebels apparently refused to use when they filled their censers with the coals. They were rejecting the Creator Himself, not just His gift. We are going to see that they were rejecting God Himself. They refused *Him*, because later on the Bible's imagery teaches us that the fire is a symbol of refining and purification, and that is the very purpose of the altar. It is symbolically the place of purification.

**Malachi 3:1-4** Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom you seek shall

suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom you delight in: behold, he shall come, says the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

**Hebrews 12:24-29** And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you refuse not him that speaks. [Remember I told you that these people in Numbers 16 refused God. It was not just fire. They were refusing **Him**.] For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he has promised saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

God Himself was the fire! Do you understand that? When they rejected the fire that was under the altar, they were rejecting God Himself symbolically. So you see that from what we have just read we make a practical application. We have to understand that the fire is only symbolic, that God Himself is ultimately the purification agent through His creative processes. "Create in **me** a clean heart," David said. A refusal of what He directs is a refusal of Him. It is a refusal to become holy. It is a rejection of His righteousness.

Now we are going to take a closer look at the incense.

**Exodus 30:7-9** And Aaron shall burn thereon [meaning the incense altar] sweet incense every morning; when he dresses the lamps, he



shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. You shall offer no strange incense thereon, . . .

Here comes that principle again. They could only offer that which God would recognize as authentic.

**Exodus 30:9** . . . nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering: neither shall you pour drink offerings thereon.

The incense altar was within the Holy Place—the first room of the Tabernacle, and also in the Temple. It was placed against the back wall against the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. It stood directly in front of the Mercy Seat and the Ark. A priest burned incense on it twice a day—morning and evening—using burning coals that had been taken from under the brazen altar. Incense offered could not be profane either. The only incense acceptable was that made to God's specification.

**Exodus 30:34-37** And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto you sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: And you shall make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: And you shall beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with you: it shall be unto you most holy. [Not just holy, but *most* holy. Now *how* "most holy"?] And as for the perfume which you shall make, you shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto you holy for the LORD.

Do you understand what He said there? They were not allowed to make any incense that was a duplicate of what was going to be put on the incense altar. It could not be duplicated for personal use.

**Exodus 30:38** Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people. [The death sentence. "Most holy"]

You are beginning to see how important your prayers are to God. They are *most holy* to Him, and they are to be made ***only to Him***. Prayers are not to go to anybody else, either our own personal gratification, or to impress others. They are intended only for God Himself. Are you beginning to see why Jesus said, "When you pray, go into your closet." That is just one little aspect of it. So anybody who even made some of this incense for his own personal use was to be put to death.

I do not understand every reason that God had in mind for these details, but I do know this: His reasons are for our good. Every act of His is given—every command is given—as an act of love in the outworking of His creative purposes in us. There is some important lesson, and it may seem to be a small thing to us, but its real meaning may be very important to us.

I do understand a little bit about the fire under the altar. There is no indication that God was going to keep the fire going by a miracle. Remember, He told them, "***You*** shall not let it go out." It was the priest's responsibility to keep it going, and that is why the warning is given not to let it go out.

The altar is the place of the priest's service to God. Fire compares to heat. Heat compares to passion. Passion compares to enthusiasm. It is our responsibility to keep the passion for service to God going. Paul put it this way. He said, "Stir up the spirit that is within you." He says, "Fan it into a flame." God is not going to keep it going. ***We*** have to do that. If He heats things up, it might be with a lightning bolt! It might be for a terrible trial to get us back to the enthusiasm, to the fervency that we once had when we were called.

Now perhaps the most macabre and grisly scene in this whole affair there in Numbers 16 through 18 may have been to witness the true priests picking

among the charred bodies. Think if you can what just happened over there in Israel in that pizza joint. If you read any of the accounts, body parts were scattered all over the street. Body parts were splattered against automobiles, hanging from pieces of walls and all kinds of things all over the place.

And so here are the priests out there picking up the body parts in the midst of the stench, the smoldering embers, and the twisted parts of the rebels, to gather each and every one of the censers, because the censers were holy. Each and every one of them had to be accounted for. Each and every one of them had to be recorded, and then each and every one of them had to be cleansed because each one of them was holy. And then they were hammered into plates and then fastened to the altar where they became the altar's façade, thus covering its exterior. From that time on that sheet of bronze served as a constant visible reminder of the folly of rebellion against holy things.

This also serves as a constant reminder that nobody was permitted to offer incense before God except the one set apart, sanctified for that privilege and responsibility, and that was the priest's. He had to be a descendant of Aaron. In contrast to Korah and his band, Eleazar and his group of priests showed their faith and did exactly as they were told.

There is one final thing that I want to go into in regard to this, but I see that there is not enough time for me to go through this now, so I will save it and I think it will provide a good introduction. It has to do with the eating of clean and unclean things. We are going to see that these things too are holy, and if you eat unclean things you are defiling the temple of the living God. To eat anything that is unclean is abominable to God. We are to eat only those things brethren that God Himself would eat. If we eat unclean things (and maybe I can add to this, "junk") are we treating our holy selves in the way that God wants us to treat Him, because He is "in" us? With that sobering thought we will close off for today.