

The Priesthood Of God (Part 4)

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If you will, please turn to Romans 15. We are going to continue on the subject of the priesthood:

Romans 15:3-4 For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me. For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Just before the Feast of Tabernacles, I received a very nicely written, and I am sure a well-meant letter, mildly chastising us in the Church of God because we spend so much time speaking and writing about things in the Old Testament. The writer was not abusive, and he stated that he very much liked our website and its materials.

His point seemed to be drawn from a comment made by Paul in I Corinthians 1, where Paul says, "We [meaning himself and other Christian ministers] preach Christ crucified." The inference of the writer was that the Old Testament did not have enough value for a Christian to spend time upon, and its instruction, though it might be colorful, was at the same time spiritually outdated, quaint, and replaced by New Testament teaching centered on Jesus Christ Himself.

What this man does not grasp in his misunderstanding is that the foundations for all of Christ's and the apostle's teachings are found in the Old Testament. Without firm foundations, a building—in this case a spiritual life—soon crumbles and is swept away because of internal weaknesses.

One commentator, in doing some research in what those two verses said, "A very practical and unforgettable passage. It informs us that if religion is going to mean anything to us, we must practice it."

The Old Testament focuses on practical instruction that is useful to this very day. Christianity is not merely a theory to be believed, but a dynamic, living force. In these verses, 3 and 4, Paul, for the very first time in this epistle, directly holds out Jesus Christ as an example to follow.

Christ was faced with the very same problems we, as His followers, are faced with today. Should we merely please ourselves? Should we merely speak and do what others seem to demand of us, or should we resolve to be guided by our commitment to do the will of God?

Christ's own answer to these questions was, "I always do what pleases Him." That is in John 8:29. There, brethren, is our example. He also said, "The zeal for your house will consume me." That appears in John 2. But it was taken from Psalm 69:9, which adds that He was going to follow God zealously, fervently, with all of His might. He was not merely going to "pity pat" behind Him in doing God's will, but rather He was going to push forward in doing it.

In fact, the indication is that He would be doing it right out in front of everybody. Of course we know He did do that.

In this context, in Romans 14 and 15, Paul would have us realize that we are to seek the good of others, even if we are misunderstood and maligned in doing so, because that is God's will. If somebody is offended because we obey God, because we submit to God, because we are fervent toward God—TOUGH! That is basically what He is said.

We are to do it, not in the sense that it is an in-your-face kind of thing, but we are not to hide our light before men either. So there is a right balance in this regard.

Then Paul goes on to instruct us that the Old Testament was deliberately planned and caused to be written for our edification and up-building. The New Testament actually shows that the church is dependent upon Old Testament histories. I do not know how much of the New Testament is actually quotes from the Old Testament.

The examples that the apostles used so often in their writings, exhortations, and appeals to the brethren were taken from the Old Testament. Right here in the book of Romans, where did Paul get the example that he used of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ? It came from Abraham; it was taken all the way back from Genesis 12, 13, 14, and 15—right at the beginning of the book. Thus it is with every major doctrine of the New Covenant, most of it came right out of the Old Testament. It is taught using those examples.

That is why Paul says the Old Testament was deliberately planned and then caused to be written for our up-building. Paul is saying that the Old Testament is just as relevant as it ever has been. We are to look at its precepts and examples as resources for Christian faith and hope.

In it we see how God has acted and reacted in the past during the trials of others. Through these things, we see then, the scripture gives guidance, promotes perseverance (Old Testament scriptures I am saying), gives exhortation, and encouragement. So the study we are involved in, in these series of sermons, portrays for us many aspects of holiness and responsibilities we might otherwise never come to understand.

In the last message on the priesthood, I spent the entire time on God's holiness because holiness is so very important to a priest's life work as an example before those worshipping God. We found that God's holiness is much more than His morality.

In fact the term "holy" is a catchall term used to describe God's uniqueness. He is holy. He is unique. There is nobody else like Him. Standing alone, the term "holy" indicates different, separate, set apart, or even a cut above. And it is used to distinguish one or a group from another or another group.

However, in reality, as the Bible describes God, He is far more than merely different or separate. So men look around for a better term or terms that would describe Him. One of the terms that they came up with—it is a good one, but I can guarantee that you are probably not familiar with it—is numinous. God is numinous. It is actually a very good term. At first glance (I can see the blank looks out there), it does not help much because it is a term we are not familiar with. It means, "evoking awe or reverence."

Depending upon the context, it is also synonymous with (this is interesting) irrational. God is a being that we cannot get hold of. It is not rational. He is not rational to our thinking. He is so far beyond us

that we cannot really, in a sense, make Him out. We have nothing to relate to Him. So what happens, when people really meet Him, boy they fall on their face. It is synonymous with irrational, inscrutable, and mysterious.

It characterizes—numinous does—a feeling of fascination that is mixed with awe and reverence. It is so far beyond us, it is irrational to us. We have nothing that we can really relate to Him.

Let me put it this way: There is about God a presence that at one and the same time moves people to feel filthy, dirty, by comparison and overwhelmed; awed to the point of cringing with one's nose in the dust by a sense of dreadful power one cannot hide from. It is sort of like, "Get away from me, lest I die." That is the way Isaiah felt, because he said, "I am a man of unclean lips." It is sort of like... anything that comes out of me is going to be filthy dirty.

Do you feel like you would like to meet God along the way? I do not think that when we are thinking rationally that we want to do this. He is an irrational being.

Is it not interesting that back in I John 3, John says, "We will see Him as He is"? Until then, we cannot really grasp Him.

So the writers collected everything together and they say, "He is holy." It is something beyond us. He is different. What He is cannot really be grasped. He is unique. We know this: Though He is unique, He is clean, He is majestic, He is dynamic, He is pure in all of His actions, all of His judgments. He is love personified.

Well, brethren, our responsibility is to become holy. Should we go so far as to say, we are to be holy as God is holy. I wonder, brethren, will we ever reach that, even when we are in His Kingdom completely and totally and part of his family...will we ever reach what He is?

It is nice to think about. We can spin our wheels in our minds thinking about it. I hope we do eventually come to that place, because being like that must really be great or He would not be that way.

So our responsibility is to become holy. We will never reach that point where we will be as holy as God is holy in this life. But we are nonetheless called upon by God, exhorted by Him, to strive—at the very least—for a moral holiness.

There is no way, brethren, that one can add to the holiness that is imputed to us when by God's grace we have imputed to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We will never become (in this life) any holier than that. I am sure that that is only a tiny portion of His holiness, if the whole package could be rolled into one. What is given to us, accounted to us, enables us to come into His presence, talk to Him, and study with Him.

Why is there so much emphasis on holiness, especially directed toward the priesthood? Well, there is a very logical reason why. It is because the priests—through their religious instruction given to the people and living example of their life conducted before them, when combined with the tabernacle, the temple and all of the services conducted there; including the Levites' functioning in their responsibilities, caring for the tabernacle/temple and all of the accouterments—are called upon by God to be constant reminders to the entire nation and/or church that everybody is to be holy as God is holy. Not just the priests and Levites.

This is made even more important to you and me because we are to be a kingdom of priests, who are being created in the image of Jesus Christ. We all know, we all understand, that those priests and Levites of old could never measure up. They did not have the spirit of God. But, brethren, you and I do have the spirit of God and "to whom much is given, the much more is required."

We have to measure up higher than those men who went before us in those offices under the Old Covenant. And believe me, there was some pretty holy men involved in that, like Aaron and Eleazar, and Phineas, and I am sure many others besides.

We are called upon by God to be like them in our responsibilities before Him and each other. So why is so much required? Because priests serve as living messengers of everyone's vital responsibility to be like God. We need to be reminded of this, brethren, every Sabbath. That is never to be very far from our minds.

Let us go to Exodus 19. This is a verse that we have used many times, but I wanted to touch bases with it, because I want us all to be constantly reminded of the goal that is before us.

Exodus 19:5-6 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. [notice it is conditional... 'if indeed you will obey'] And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.

Let us go from there, just remembering those words—at least the sense of them. Go back to I Peter 2, where something very similar is spoken to those of us under the new covenant.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but now are the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Remembering those words we just read, drop back to I Peter 1.

I Peter 1:13-16 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to former lusts, as in your ignorance; but [here is what we are to be sober about, here is what we are to rest our hope and goals on] as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Even as under the Old Covenant, the priests and Levites were a visible and audible link between the beginning of God's call to be holy and the fulfillment of that purpose in the Kingdom of God. Now we are in that same purpose (within that same framework), only under the New Covenant. And though there is not a priesthood of the same kind as under the Old Covenant, all of us together are a priesthood that is forming.

Therefore we are to be visible and audible links between the beginning of our calling of God to be holy and the fulfillment of that purpose in the Kingdom of God. In other words we are to be priests to each other. We have priestly responsibilities to each other. We serve under our High Priest, the Lord Christ.

So holiness is very important to those who are called to serve God in such an intimate association. The intimate association is with the Father and the Son and each other. We are all a part of one family. There is an intimate relationship there that God expects within His family. He expects that whole family to become holy as He is holy.

With that point made, we are going to go back to the original course showing the progression of the priesthood's existence and responsibilities and how they impact on us under the New Covenant. So we will go back to Exodus 4. We are going to read a series of verses here. This is one set of verses.

Exodus 4:14-16 So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. [Now listen to this carefully.] And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God.

I think you understand the context here. It is whenever Moses resisted God's charge to him to be His prophet and to go speak to Pharaoh. Moses made excuses like most of us do. "I cannot do that." I think that he honestly did not feel very highly about himself. A great deal of the pride he had before had been taken away from him because of his experiences over 40 years out of Egypt. So now he did not think he could do the job.

Exodus 5:1-4 Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel; 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" And Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go." So they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." Then the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor."

That describes their first meeting with Pharaoh, and they are rejected. We are going to go to chapter 7, and we will see a bit of a difference here.

Exodus 7:1-2 So the Lord said to Moses: "See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land.

Let us just briefly untangle what these scriptures are telling us. First of all understand that prophets are separate from the priesthood. Prophets were called by God from any tribe, including Levi, and in special circumstances; and they were given a message and a responsibility to carry out.

Now within that special circumstance, they appear to be given higher ranking and authority than even the high priests, which was the second highest ranking office in the nation. But, when a prophet was appointed, it appears as though he superseded even a high priest.

The term, "prophet," basically designates one who speaks for another. He is a spokesman for God of the message given him by God. Now in relation to God, Moses was God's prophet or spokesman. But, Moses, in relation to Pharaoh and Aaron, had a position akin to God.

Thus Aaron became Moses' prophet or spokesman communicating Moses' message to whomever the message was intended. You see the scale that was there. And really Moses was in a very high position, even higher than just an ordinary prophet would be.

So by stating things as God does here, especially in Exodus 7:1-2, God makes it clear that Moses carried the authority despite the fact that Aaron was the older and more eloquent speaker of the brothers. We find, if we would go back to Exodus 4:16, it is clear that Aaron did most of the speaking when they were communicating with Israelites. However chapter 5, verse 1 clarifies that at times Moses and Aaron both spoke to Pharaoh.

Moses gave the charge, and I think that it is very possible that Moses may have spoken with the authority of his office to Pharaoh; and Aaron clarified it, if it appeared Pharaoh was not getting it. So do you have that all straight now?

Next time you see the Ten Commandments movie and Moses is speaking...that is probably true. Even though Aaron was his prophet, Moses spoke as well. We have to understand that apparently Moses was not an eloquent speaker—even as he said he was not—but he did not have the faith to understand that it did not matter how he said it, it was God that was going to make the impact upon Pharaoh. But, He did give him the help of his brother who was a very fine speaker.

We are going to read two verses in Exodus 28.

Exodus 28:1-2 Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to me as priest, Aaron and Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

Let me back off just a bit what we just went through there in the early chapters of Exodus, was setting the arrangement of Moses' and Aaron's relationship to God and to Pharaoh. And now here they are out in the wilderness. What God is going to do is begin to fill the offices beneath those two men. Exodus 28:1 shows that Moses is to take Aaron and Aaron's sons and begin to do something with them.

Exodus 28:41 So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them [them being Aaron and Aaron's sons], and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me as priests.

This takes place when Israel is free from their bondage to Egypt. Moses is already clearly established as God's prophet, and the tabernacle is under construction.

So God is now filling in offices under Moses. This was done to enable Israel to be organized toward meeting their responsibility to be a holy nation. God did not have intermediaries there. What did they have to see? Where would they get instruction from?

So the intermediaries between God and the people were the priests. They are the bridge, giving instruction and showing an example. He appointed—God did—Aaron as high priest and Aaron's sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, as priests. One of those sons would follow Aaron as high priest, when Aaron died.

We are going to go back to the New Testament.

Hebrews 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Hebrews 5:4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Now we just read that: the calling of Aaron and Aaron's sons in Exodus 28:1, 41. There is a couple more verses to add: Exodus 29:9 and 29:29-30.

We are in Hebrews; I want you to go to Hebrews 7.

Hebrews 7:22-24 By so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But, He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

Now, I should have read verse 20 as well.

Hebrews 7:20 And inasmuch as He [Christ] was not made priest without an oath.

The reason I wanted these verses is because of what it said about Aaron. Those verses (Hebrews 5:1, 4) confirm for us that Aaron's specific calling was to this very high office.

So we just read of his appointment in Exodus 28. The high priest and his fellow priests are most certainly not to be those who appointed themselves to these offices. So the high priest and his fellow priests were to act on behalf of men before God, because every aspect one can observe in the tabernacle and temple arrangements of worship is that men are personally cut off from God. That is very important. Somebody had to stand there, representing God.

Korah and his group had no appreciation whatever for the fact of Moses' and Aaron's special calling and responsibility. Their—Korah and his group—lack of fear of God led directly to their deaths. That is quite a warning.

We just read Hebrews 7:21-24 and one of the things that showed to us was that only one high priest occupied that position at a time. He was always a descendant of Aaron.

Those verses show two of the weaknesses of the Aaronic system. One is that the high priest was always subject to death, unlike Christ, who is eternal; and the quality of men in that office was highly variable. Christ never changes.

Josephus tells us that there were 80 high priests between Aaron and the time of Christ. That office was suitable for the times, but it was still not designed by God to produce what He ultimately desired.

What He ultimately desired is what we are involved in: that all might have a personal intimate relationship with Him.

Now remember—we are going back to the Old Testament now—those men have just been appointed to that office. In order to really appreciate this, I think that you have to put yourself in the mode of understanding how important this office is.

Leviticus 10:1-2 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So the fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

He incinerated them. What do we need to understand here? First of all the context here shows a high level of holiness which God requires of the office of priest. These men were not high priests. They were just regular priests. Nadab and Abihu quickly eliminated themselves from any further consideration to serve in the office. So that reduced the high priest office to only two possible lines: Eleazar and Ithamar.

We are going to go to Numbers 3. This is just a reminder of what happened there with Nadab and Abihu.

Numbers 3:4 Nadab and Abihu had died before the Lord when they offered profane fire before the Lord in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests in the presence of Aaron their father.

Now all it took, brethren, (I want you to think about this) for God to react the way He did was one foolish act on their part. One time they did it wrong.

One of the reasons men feel that He reacted in the way He did is because they were just getting started, and He wanted to impress on any who would be serving in that office (just as regular priests, not even the high priest) that God wanted them to understand that He wanted things done exactly the way He said. No deviations. No innovations. Nothing new. "Just follow what I said to do!"

Apparently the only thing they did wrong was instead of using coals from the fire that He Himself started, they took fire from a common fire (a cook fire or whatever), and they used that to make their offering.

Can you see the fire that He gave them came directly from Him, and it was holy as He is holy? He wanted absolutely no deviations, and the Israelites were under command to keep that fire going and never to let it go out.

The offerings had to be burned with coals that came from that fire, day in and day out, morning in and morning out, afternoon in and afternoon out, holy day in holy day out; for months, years, decades, scores of years—they kept that fire going wherever they went. So in order to impress everybody that He meant what He said, He reacted.

There are other occasions that things of this nature occurred. One of them happened right after they went into the land when the fellow stole the gold from Jericho. But, one of them happened in the New Testament, too.

Turn back to Acts 5. This the occasion with Ananias and Sapphira. Peter said to her in verse 9,

Acts 5:9-11 How is it that you have agreed together [They conspired. It was a deliberate act on their part] 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. 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. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

It seems as though in certain occasions when something is just beginning that God retains His pattern, and He does something really devastating so the people get the right understanding that His holiness is not to be tested.

Leviticus 10:8-11 Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may be able to distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses"

These verses provide a very strong hint that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of alcohol when they committed the act of putting the strange fire to an unholy use.

I wonder how many drink a bottle of beer or a glass of wine or a mixed drink while they are studying or praying. We had a relative in our family who did that. He was never in the church. But, his wife used to complain, and she mentioned it while we were there. She said, "He studies the Bible with a bottle of beer in his hand."

Even she could understand there is something wrong with that. I do not know. But, at any rate, in light of this incident here, and the fact that we have been called to be a kingdom of priests, it does not seem that that is a good practice.

We need to have the clearest mind possible while we are studying God's word and praying to Him. Otherwise, as we are studying, meditating, how are we going to be able to distinguish the clean from the unclean, the right from the wrong?

Now there is a time for alcohol. But it seems like the time is not when we are doing things right in the presence of God like that in an intimate way.

Leviticus 21:16-21 And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to Aaron saying: 'No man of your descendants in succeeding generations, who has any defect, may approach to offer the bread of his God. For any man who has a defect shall not approach: a man blind or lame, who has a marred face or any limb too long, a man who has a broken foot or a broken hand, or is a hunchback or a dwarf, or a man who has a defect in his eye, or eczema or scab, or is a eunuch. No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to the Lord. He has a defect; he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God.'"

This section focuses on some of the physical qualifications for the priesthood. In brief we can say that if any of Aaron's sons were physically disfigured or deformed, that this disqualified the man for the priesthood. To be physically disfigured or deformed marred the picture of what God in His holiness is. God is perfect in body, and He wants those who represent Him in this office to be perfect as well.

What would happen if a priest—let us say working around his house—broke a finger or a hand or an arm? He was disqualified. He could not work around the altar until it was healed and he was a whole man once again. It did not disqualify him forever, but he was not allowed to do anything around the altar until it was healed.

What we are seeing here is that there are boundaries being set. These statements here, in Leviticus 21, are very much like, "This far and no farther"—setting standards regarding physical imperfections required to keep a man away from doing those responsibilities.

So those who serve a holy God in a holy place must be as far removed from unclean or profane as possible, even physically. They must reflect a high human measure of perfect holiness as our savior Jesus Christ and the Father did.

Now there is an interesting thing in verse 23. Let us read verse 22 also.

Leviticus 21:22-23 'He may eat the bread of his God, both the most holy and the holy; only he shall not go near the veil or approach the altar, because he has a defect, lest he profane my sanctuaries; for I the Lord sanctify them.'

Pretty stringent standards. But, again—do not let this get far from your mind—God is going to want us to reflect His holiness as much as we possibly can, even as He wanted His holiness reflected in these physical areas by these people.

Leviticus 21:1-5 And the Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'None shall defile himself for the dead among his people, [Who is he talking about here? He is talking about the priesthood again.] except for his relatives who are nearest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother, also his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may defile himself. [Again, what you are seeing is God setting boundaries.] Otherwise he shall not defile himself, being [here comes why] a chief man among his people, to profane himself. They shall not make any bald place on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

These are things the pagans did as part of their practices, and no one who is a priest serving God is to imitate in any way shape or form anything that the pagans do. You are beginning to see that He is touching on looks, He is touching on hair, He is touching on the way they take care of their face and other parts of their body. They are to make no cuttings, and I would imagine, too, that this would cover things like tattoos. People have been doing that for thousands of years. God considers that a defacing of the gift of our body that He has given us. It does not make God holy to see us defacing ourselves.

Leviticus 21:6-7 They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God.

A priest had to marry a virgin from his own family. By family I mean Eleazar's family or Ithamar's family. Why? He knows what would be produced. That is what the issue was. So this law was made in order to make sure that the high priestly line was always racially pure, by that I mean always from Aaron.

Leviticus 21:8-9 Therefore you shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy. The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire.

Pretty stiff. I think you are beginning to get the point that for those who have such a close relationship with God, there are demanding requirements given them to continue in that office. You see, this includes you and me now, because we are called to be priests. Can you begin to see the level of holiness that God requires of us, because of the office that we have been called to? Brethren, Americans are so informal. God likes both. There is a place for informality, but not when we are serving Him.

Leviticus 21:10-15 He who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; [I believe it means that he shall not make himself bald.] nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother; nor shall he go out of the sanctuary of his God, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is upon him: I am the Lord. And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman or a harlot—these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife. Nor shall he profane his posterity among his people, for I the Lord sanctify him.

Just a summary of this: A priest who is not ceremonial clean was not permitted to perform his duties until he was once again ceremonial clean. These verses here detail circumstances that render a priest unclean or temporarily defiled, prohibiting him from serving in his normal office for a period of time. On most of these occasions what happened was the priest became ceremonial unclean inadvertently, thus it involved no presumptuousness on the priests part.

Touching someone who is dead is the first thing addressed. The thought is this: the living God is clean and pure. Sin is the cause of death. So death and sin are enemies of God and therefore defiling. Since the priest is a leader in holiness and handles holy things, these laws magnify the carefulness with which he must conduct his life. He cannot allow himself to become defiled in any way.

This basket of ceremonial regulations tends to indicate that, when one compares the mildness of merely having to wash oneself or make a sacrificial offering, in order to be considered clean once again and therefore able to carry out the priestly duties, the stiffness of the penalty in Leviticus 10 for

Nadab and Abihu indicates that their sin must have had an element of deliberate presumptuousness in it. It was not just merely an oversight. Their problem was they were enough under the influence that they were not thinking straight, so they just barreled right in and did what they did regardless of what the consequences might be.

Now, when we compare the instructions for the animal offerings themselves (those begin in Leviticus 1, 2, 3, and so forth), would we not find that every animal offering had to be unblemished? The animal had to be as perfect as possible.

Now add to that we also find the offering priests had to be without blemish. Then even over and above that, the high priest especially had to be without blemish. Now why? Well, we could say it is because of holiness.

But, right now this is more important for us to understand. Each one of them—the animal, the priest, and the high priest—typified Jesus Christ. He was perfect in every count as our representative before God, as our Priest. He is the model for each aspect of these ceremonies. Holiness is repeatedly emphasized as the ideal toward which all must aim, because all are representing God, and this is a highly, highly responsible position.

I think that you can begin to appreciate that because of this, the priest's life was hedged about with all sorts of restrictions designed to help him maintain his state of holiness to God. Can you begin to understand, at least partly, what Peter said in Acts 15, when they were talking about circumcision and so forth? He said, "*Do you not understand that this was a yoke that we could not bear?*" Can you imagine having to live like this?

It is hard for us to think about living like this. But, understand this: remember I said to you earlier that the apostle Paul points out in Romans 15 that the Old Testament was deliberately designed in the way it was and then caused to be written by God, so that there would be a record for you and me when we came along. It is there for our learning. God expects of us the very highest in the way of conduct and attitude before Him, the world, and the rest of the church as well.

Our lives are hedged in with all kinds of restrictions that human nature very much likes to get rid of. Those things are designed so that we can learn from them and make the very best use of them in keeping ourselves as clean, as holy before God, and as different from this world in a righteous way that we possibly can.

If you think about that long enough, you will be awfully glad that you were not a priest. It makes you wonder, did they have any fun at all? I will tell you what. I think if they were soberly serious about their job, they probably had more good times than anyone else in the camp, because that is the way God makes it up. He gives those people the blessing so that there is in them a sense of well-being about what they are doing, and they have the right kind of pride before God to represent Him in that way.

Please be impressed that God demands of you and me a very high level of holiness to strive for.