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THE OFFERING OF STRANGE FIRE.

– JULY 21. – LEV. 10:1-11. –

Golden Text – "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee." – Verse 9.

THE text of this lesson introduces to us the typical religious service of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, instituted by God in connection with the giving of the law to Israel.

See TABERNACLE SHADOWS.

The tabernacle, with all its appointments and service, is of special interest to Christians, not merely as a matter of Jewish history, but because, both in its construction and in its service, it was typical of spiritual things in store for the Gospel Church. The plan and materials of its construction, [R1836 : page 159] every board and curtain, every article of its furniture, and the colors and designs of its ornamentation, as well as its priesthood, its sacrifices and all its forms and ceremonies, were full of significance as "shadows of heavenly things," of the divine plan of redemption and reconciliation through Christ, which began to be wrought out in Christ at his first advent, has been gradually working out all through the Gospel age and will be completed in the Millennial age.

There are three points to which special attention is called in this lesson; viz, (1) The sanctification or setting apart of Aaron and his four sons to the priesthood; (2) The abuse of the office on the part of two of the sons, and (3) The penalty which followed. While these things would have but small interest to us as mere matters of history, they are seen to be of immense importance to all Christians, when their typical significance is considered.

The High Priest, Aaron, and the under or subordinate priests, his sons, in their typical official capacity, represented Christ Jesus and his Church during the Gospel age, whose chief duty during this age is to offer the acceptable sacrifices of this antitypical day of atonement, as represented in the type. (Heb. 9:22,23.) It should be observed that the number of priests, five, in comparison with the hosts of Israel, who represented the whole world, was very small. So, in the antitype, it is but a "little flock" (Luke 12:32); and they are chosen for their office for the purpose, not of condemning, but of serving and blessing the world, as shown in the type and indicated by the term priesthood.

It is a great honor now, as it was then in the type, to be called to this high office of service with Christ our Lord and Head, to be, with him, a royal priesthood, a holy nation a peculiar people; but as such let us not forget that we are to be a people zealous of good works – a people cleansed from sin, as symbolized by the washing and the clean white linen robes of the typical priesthood. We must by faith appropriate the robe of Christ's righteousness; and then, as the typical priesthood was anointed with the holy anointing oil, so must we be anointed with the holy spirit, and thereafter fully submit ourselves to the leading of the holy spirit of God, which speaks to us in no uncertain tones through his precious Word.

While it is a great privilege and honor to be called to the priesthood, and to be robed and anointed for its service, the typical incident of this lesson conveys to us a solemn warning of responsibility. Nadab and Abihu, the two eldest sons of Aaron, without authority presumed to offer incense before the Lord. This duty was appointed to Aaron only. It was to be performed in a particular way, and only on the day of atonement, and with fire taken from the altar of sacrifice. (Lev. 16:2,11-13.) In offering the incense these two members of the priesthood took upon themselves to do what they were not commanded to do, and also in a time and manner unauthorized, taking the fire also from some other source than the altar of sacrifice. Their burning incense was therefore called "strange fire" – unauthorized.

Their sin was a presumptuous sin, and the penalty was death. As immediately following the record (verses 9-11), there is the prohibition of wine or strong drink to the priests in the service of the tabernacle, the intimation seems to be that the two offenders were to some extent under such influence when they offered the "strange fire" – strange or unacceptable incense.

What is the lesson here shadowed forth for the antitypical priesthood, the truly consecrated and anointed Church of Christ? The special lesson to all such is, Beware of presumptuous sins! The offering of incense by Aaron, the typical High Priest, and made by fire from the altar of sacrifice, represented the sweet odor unto God of the perfect obedience of Christ, our great High Priest, even when tried in the fires of the altar of sacrifice. As thus on the day of atonement, after the offering of the sin-offering, Aaron burned the incense in the holy place before the Lord, so Christ, after offering his great sacrifice for us, entered into heaven itself with the sweet incense of his perfect obedience, and his sacrifice was therefore acceptable to God on our behalf. (Heb. 9:24; Rev. 8:3.) And as the offering of the sacrifice with the incense was on behalf of the under-priests and of all Israel as well, so the offering of Christ is for the priesthood, the Church, as well as for the whole world. (1 John 2:2.) True, we are to be laid with him on the altar of sacrifice; but our sacrifice would avail nothing were it not for his sacrifice and the sweet odor of his personal merit ascending God with our prayers for a share in his meritorious covering. – Rev. 8:3.

We, the Church, the antitypical under-priests, must therefore beware of the presumptuous sin of offering strange fire, strange incense, before the Lord, of presuming to approach God in our own righteousness. Only in acknowledgement of the sweet savor of Christ's righteousness, applied to us by faith in his blood, are we acceptable with God. Another lesson is that we should pay our vows unto the Most High with scrupulous exactness, and, to this end, keep the head clear and the heart right by obediently abstaining **[R1837 : page 159]** from the intoxicating spirit of the world; but "Be ye filled with the spirit" –

the spirit of obedience and of a sound mind. (Psa. 19:13; Eph. 5:17,18; 2 Tim. 1:7.) In so doing we shall not be tempted to offer strange fire before the Lord, but will humbly trust in the acceptable incense of Christ our Redeemer, and ever observe a well defined line between the holy and the unholy, the clean and the unclean. – Lev. 10:9-11.

The displeasure of the Lord against those who presume to approach him with "strange fire" – knowing that they are not coming in his appointed way – is indicated, and the penalty illustrated, in the fate of the two sons of Aaron. (Verse 2.) "And there went out a fire from the Lord [probably a lightning stroke] and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron [in explanation of the summary judgment], This is what the Lord hath spoken, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace." – Verse 3.

The destruction of the two presumptuous priests who thus attempted to present themselves before the Lord in other than his appointed way illustrates the teaching of the Lord and the apostles that the second death will be that "sorcer punishment" which those of the antitypical priesthood will incur who attempt to appear before the Lord and to offer strange fire – strange incense which he did not authorize and cannot approve. The righteousness of Christ is the only acceptable incense; and we dare not come in our own. That we have been called to the priesthood and anointed with the holy anointing oil (the holy spirit) is no guarantee that we shall retain that office if we do despite unto the spirit of favor, despise God's appointed way, and so forfeit his approval. (Heb. 10:29,30.) Nor is the penalty indicated merely the forfeiture of the official honor; but it is death, the second death, from which there shall be no awakening. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the Lord has declared that he will be sanctified, that his name shall be honored before the people in those whom he owns as his consecrated priests. And those taking upon themselves the vows of the priesthood and receiving the divine anointing, who afterward at heart despise the

Lord's appointments and ignore their covenant relationship with him, [R1837 : page 160] have no other hope than that indicated in the death of the two typical priests who offered strange fire.

"And Aaron held his peace." In the office of high priest, Aaron was a type of Christ, the High Priest of our profession, who will make no intercession for the recovery of those who sin unto death. His silence approves the judgment of God.

And Moses called the relatives of the two dead priests and said unto them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. So they went near and carried them in their coats out of the camp, as Moses had said. And Moses said unto Aaron and unto Eleazer and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads; neither rend your clothes, lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people; but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled [bewail the fact that these had so incurred the wrath of God]. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation [– ye shall not leave the holy place to follow after and lament the dead ones], lest ye [also] die; for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you [– *i.e.*, you are consecrated to full submission and obedience to the will of God]. And they did according to the word of Moses" – the representative of God. – Verses 4-7. So all who remain loyal to God will approve his righteous judgments. Nor will they leave the holy place of fellowship and communion with God to follow those spiritually dead into the outer darkness. And all who have the spirit of God will show by their conduct that, while they approve God's righteous sentence, they feel as he does about it, when he says, "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." – Ezek. 33:11.

It is a fact worthy of notice that one-half of those called and consecrated to the typical priesthood (as under-priests, representing the consecrated of this age) forfeited their lives by offering the strange fire. If this proportion is typical of a similar loss amongst the called and

consecrated of this age, it bids us be all the more upon our guard to make our calling and election sure.

While the death penalty was promptly visited upon the erring typical priests we must not forget that theirs was not the "sorer punishment" – the second death – due to a violation of the New Covenant obligations by the antitypical priesthood. They forfeited only the present life, or rather the few more years they might otherwise have lived. In the resurrection-day they also will come forth to trial for everlasting life under the favorable circumstances of Christ's glorious reign.
