

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

LEVITICUS 10:1-3

Leviticus spends almost all its time establishing and giving accounts of the new practices and rituals for the newly created People of God. These practices and rituals serve many important purposes, including the proper way to worship God. Israel has spent the last 400 years as slaves in Egyptian captivity. The people, their society, how they function, and even how they approach God has been fundamentally shaped by this captivity. Now the people are no longer captives. They have been rescued and delivered by God. So God gives the people new guidelines by which to live. These guidelines refocus the identity of the people on the nature of God, or what can be described as holy.

God's holiness, which is intrinsic to his nature as Creator and his completely separate existence from creation, is often portrayed as good and life sustaining (see Isaiah 6, that the "whole earth" is full of his glory). But there is a paradox within God's holiness: while it is good and life giving, it can also be dangerous and deadly. This is because God is holy, and anything unholy or impure cannot exist in the holy presence of God. Like impurities in iron when put into a furnace, anything unholy becomes consumed by the intensity of God's holiness.

When Nadab and Abihu offer "unholy fire" before God, they place their unholy act into the presence of God's holiness. Holiness will always consume and overcome what is unholy. In this case, the unholy fire is destroyed, along with the ones who brought it. This kind of consequence is not unusual in the Old Testament, where approaching God is serious and needs to be done with reverence and care. Moses becomes an intercessor who goes to God on behalf of the people. Aaron and the Levites are established as priests to instill the reverence, care, and dependence that is appropriate in going before the Lord. How people approach and understand God matters.

So how can anyone stand in God's holy presence? Enter Christ, the one who fulfilled all of the prophecies, the one who embodied all of the law, the one whose life, death, and resurrection brought salvation and rescue to the whole world. Now when God's people enter into his presence, they do so through Jesus. He is our high priest. He is the one who makes us clean. Reverence combines with celebration and praise in the presence of Christ. Through Christ, the power of God empowers the people of God to live out his will and demonstrate his holy nature.

A worldly view of grace and love carries little power. They become good ideas that we aspire to live out when it works for us. In truth, grace and love are part of God's holy nature. Embracing and living inside God's grace and love is being connected to the source of life and power that is God. This is not common. It is sacred. Consider today the power of God made available to us through Christ.