

Leviticus 10:1-3; 2 Samuel 6:1-11 "Is God Fair?" [\[1\]](#)

Main Idea: Today we want to tackle two difficult to explain texts from God's Word that illustrate God's Holiness (or should I say, allow them to "tackle us").

I. The Illustrations of God's Holiness

A. Nadab & Abihu (Leviticus 10)

B. Uzzah (II Samuel 6)

II. The Implications of God's Holiness

A. A Holy God must deal justly with sin.

B. God does not owe us mercy.

C. Don't presume upon the Patience of God.

There are some passages in the Bible that are difficult to explain. If we're honest, and if we've spent any time whatsoever reading the Bible, we've wondered why God allowed certain things to happen.

Why would God completely obliterate humanity by a universal flood, save Noah and his family?

Why would God instruct the Israelites to destroy thousands of people when they moved into the Promised Land? Read through Joshua and you see city after city mowed down in a holy war (Jericho, Ai, Hazor). By God's command.

Why would God tell Saul to utterly destroy the people of Amalek in I Sam 15, men, women, children, and even animals? And why was Samuel so upset when he found out that Saul spared King Agag? Didn't Saul do the merciful thing? Why did Samuel proceed to take Agag's life with the sword?

Why would God take the lives of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? All they did was tell a little lie? They probably had given more to the church than a lot of people.

Is God fair? Is He unfair?

We'll never make sense out of life until we come to grips with this truth--God is holy. In fact, as we've seen in the past two messages in our current series, God's greatest attribute is His Holiness. What does it mean to say that God is Holy? Today we come to part 3 in a biblical study of "The Holiness of God."

In this message we want to tackle two difficult to explain texts from God's Word that illustrate God's Holiness (or should I say, allow them to "tackle us").

I. The Illustrations of God's Holiness

We want to look at two...

A. Nadab & Abihu (Leviticus 10)

Do you remember what happened to Nadab and Abihu? Let's sketch the background...

God chose a special people to be the object of His Love. He entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12). The book of Exodus records how God redeemed the Israelites from Egypt. He gave them a Worship Manual, the book of Leviticus. In the book of Leviticus, God explains 2 key truths:

1. He is Holy.
2. He prescribes in detail how His people were to approach Him.

God designated certain men to represent the people in their relationship with God. The Priests. God gave the Priesthood to Aaron and his descendants.

Leviticus 8-9 is the record of the Ordination Day for Aaron and his sons as the Priests of Israel. It was an exciting, joyful day! The priests led the people in worship by offering a great sacrifice.

9:24 "And there came a fire...the people shouted..."

But remember one thing. There was one key requirement for priests.

9:7 "Go...offer...as the LORD commanded."

This is critical. It's not up to men to decide how to approach a Holy God!

Watch what happened next...

10:1 "And Nadab and Abihu"

Who were they? Aaron's sons. What did they do?

10:1 "offered strange fire..."

What happened to them?

10:2 "And there went out fire from the LORD (like in 9:24, only different!)"

Wow! Fire came from heaven and obliterated Aaron's sons!

You say, "Wait a minute. Wasn't God a little hard on the boys? It was their Ordination Day! And after all, boys will be boys! What's wrong with a little adolescent prank? True, the boys let their curiosity get the best of them, and true, they were a little out of line, but fire from heaven?! Isn't that a little unfair? Was God really fair in what he did to Nadab and Abihu?"

How do you think Aaron felt? These were his sons! This was perhaps one of the most significant days in his life. To see his own flesh and blood, his own sons, following in his steps. A life of service to God ahead of them. What great potential!

But in one quick moment, their lives were snuffed out.

I can imagine Aaron going to Moses, and saying, "What's going on Moses?! What kind of a God is this?! It's not fair Moses!"

Listen to what Moses said to his brother Aaron...

Leviticus 10:3 "Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "“Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.”" Aaron remained silent."

Here's what Moses told Aaron, "Aaron, God said, 'I will be sanctified. I will be glorified.' (The NIV translates, "I will show Myself Holy.").

What had Nadab and Abihu done? Several things (1)

1. From the prohibition in vv 8-11, they may have been under the influence of alcohol.
2. They possibly made the offering at a time other than the time prescribed by God. God set up specific times for offerings.
3. Perhaps they pressed within the veil and looked into the Holy of Holies. V 1 says they made their offering "before the Lord." That was off limits.
4. They offered illegitimate, unauthorized [KJV 'strange'] fire.

What made the fire "strange"? The priests made incense by mixing aromatic spices together. They vaporized these spices by putting them in a sensor containing glowing lumps of charcoal (fire). Acc to Lev 16:12 these coals had to be taken from the altar. Had the sons obtained the fire from somewhere else?

Objection: "Fire is fire. What difference does it make where you get it?"

One big problem--v 1, "which He commanded them not."

Nadab and Abihu disobeyed. And God judged them, instantly.

Was God unfair? Was He unjust and whimsical? Was it a "little" thing? No. God had already told them ahead of time what would happen.

Ex 19:22 "Let the priests who come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them."

Listen. The closer a man is to God, the more attention he must pay to holiness. As priests, Nadab and Abihu should have known better than to act so presumptuously.

Key: God judges holy men by a higher standard.

For one "small" sin, Moses wasn't allowed to enter the Promised Land. Why not? God told him in Num 20:12, "Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Israelites." Elisha's servant, Gehazi, was struck with leprosy for one sin. So was Uzziah.

How did Aaron respond after Moses reminded him of God's holiness? V 3b "And Aaron held his peace." There was nothing he could say (see Ps 39:9). God was Just.

Illust:

B. Uzzah (2 Samuel 6)

Let me sketch the backdrop. David is the newly appointed king of Israel. One of his first executive decisions is to move the ark of God to Jerusalem. The ark was a significant box-like piece of furniture that represented the presence of a Holy God. It had been captured in battle by the Philistines, who later returned it. When David took office, the ark was being stored in the town of Kiriathjearim.

David and a large processional went to the house of Abinadab (3) to get the ark. What an exciting day it was! David wanted to start his rule as king on the right foot. He wanted to make sure God was honored. While the assembly made the 10 mile trek with the ark, they played musical instruments and praised God with a great celebration (5).

The festivity ended abruptly. Something tragic happened when they reached Chidon (I Chr 13:9). The ark was resting on a cart, which was being pulled by oxen. The cart hit a bump in the road. The ark tottered. A man named Uzzah was walking beside the cart. When he saw that the ark was going to fall, he instinctively reached out his hand to steady the ark.

What happened? Did God announce, "Thank you Uzzah!" No.

V 7 "And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah...smote him..."

Objection: "Now how do you explain that? It sure seems to me that Uzzah tried to do right, and got zapped for it! What kind of God is that? Was He Just?"

Wait a minute. I want to show you that God was indeed Just in what He did...

1. They set the ark on a "new cart" (3).

So what? What's the problem with using a cart to transport the ark? How else would they move it? No U-haul trucks! What's the problem?

The problem is that God already told the Israelites how to transport the ark. In fact, He gave them precise instructions. And using a cart was not one of them. The ark was to be carried. It had loops on the sides (Ex 25:10). Poles were to be slipped through the loops. The ark was to be carried.

Why was the ark being transported on a cart? Maybe because that's the way the Philistines had sent it back (I Sam 6). Apparently the Israelites thought it was no big deal. "Why have men carry that heavy ark on their shoulders when we can stick it on a cart, and let oxen do the work?"

Note: Look out when you think you know better than God!

eg--"I don't need church. I can worship God on my own." Who says?

eg--"I'm not happy with my spouse any more. I would be happier and could serve God better if I found a new partner."

eg--"Things are tight this month. God won't mind if I don't give my tithes and offerings. He'll understand."

O friend, be careful. Don't impose your opinions on God. That's dangerous.

2. God smote Uzzah for his "error" (NIV "irreverent act").

You say, "I don't get it. What irreverent act? What's the problem?"

The problem is that God had given His people precise instructions on how to move the ark. In fact, if you'll check out Numbers 4, you'll see that God designated the Kohathites with the responsibility for Transporting the Tabernacle, including the ark. Kohath was a son of Levi. His descendants were responsible to take care of the sacred vessels.

Listen. From childhood, the Kohathites were trained on how to do their job.

Rule #1--"Never, never, ever touch the ark of God!" Num 4:15 "...the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it; but they shall not touch any holy thing, LEST THEY DIE."

Every Kohathite was drilled in this. Don't touch the ark. That included Uzzah.

Why then did Uzzah touch the ark? He assumed something. What? When he saw the cart hit the bump, and the ark begin to topple, he looked at the ground, the dirty, dusty, muddy ground. In an instant he thought to himself, "The ark will get dirty if it falls on the ground. I'll reach out and steady it with my hand."

Listen. Uzzah was guilty of presumption. He presumed he knew what was best for the ark. He presumed his hands were less defiled than the mud. He presumed.

But God had already made it quite clear. No human hands are to touch My ark (Num 4:15). Human hands are defiled by sin.

The sin of presumption led to Uzzah's death.

At this point you may be thinking, "Okay, we've seen two illustrations of God's holiness. It's pretty clear that back in Bible times God took sin pretty seriously? But what does this say to us?"

II. The Implications of God's Holiness

What are the implications of God's Holiness? Allow me to mention three...

A. A Holy God must deal justly with sin.

Don't miss this. Incidents like what happened to Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10, and Uzzah in II Sam 6 are like bells that ring one message loud and clear. Sin is a big deal to God. Why? Because God is holy. His holiness demands that He deal justly with sin.

Listen. The amazing thing is not that God took the lives of Nadab and Abihu and Uzzah for their sins. The amazing thing is that He doesn't do the same with us when we sin. That's amazing!

Did any other priests ever violate God's commands like Nadab and Abihu? Yes. Time and time again in Israel's history...

Did God consume their lives instantly as in the case of Nadab? No.

Does that mean He was unfair with Nadab and Abihu? No.

God's normal pattern in the Bible is to put up with sinners. Time and time again He is patient, merciful, longsuffering. But periodically, God reminds us of His holiness by sudden, swift deeds of Justice.

Stephen Charnock: "He can no more cease to hate impurity than he can cease to love holiness: if he should in the least instant approve of anything that is filthy, in that moment he would disapprove of his own nature and being; there would be an interruption in his love of himself, which is as eternal as it is infinite. How can he love any sin which is contrary to his nature, but for one moment, without hating his own nature, which is essentially contrary to sin?... God indeed may be reconciled to the sinner, but never to the sin; for then he should renounce himself, deny his own essence and his own divinity, if his inclinations to the love of goodness, and his aversion from evil, could be changed, if he suffered the contempt of the one, and encouraged the practice of the other."^[2]

Do you know what our problem is? We *expect* God to be merciful...at the expense of His holiness. But His is a holy mercy.

B. God does not owe us mercy.

R.C. Sproul tells the story of an OT survey class he taught. 250 students. In the syllabus, he stated the requirement: 3 papers, due Sept 30, Oct 30, Nov 30. If the paper is not turned in on time, there will be an automatic "F". When the first paper was due, 10 people were not ready. They pleaded for mercy. "Please!" He gave an extension. The next time 25 were not ready. Another plea, and another extension. The third time, 50 people. This time, no mercy. One student objected, "That's not fair!" Sproul replied, "Ok, if you want what's fair, you get an "F" for this paper, and an "F" for the others you turned in late as well."

Please never forget this. First, a Holy God must deal with sin. Second, God does not owe us mercy. We tend to think that because God is patient and longsuffering, God doesn't care. That sin is not that big of a deal.

C. Don't presume upon the Patience of God.

Is God unfair? Listen. If God were totally "fair" and acted solely on the basis of Justice, not one of us would be here. Friend, never say to God, "Lord, I demand justice! Give me justice!" If God gave us what we deserved, we'd all be without hope.

Is God unfair? There's only one person in the history of this world with Whom God was unfair. Do you know Who that was? Jesus Christ. What God the Father did to Him was not fair.

II Cor 5:21 "He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us..."

A holy God must deal with sin, all sin. God does not owe us mercy. Don't presume upon His mercy.

Conclusion:

Objection: "Wait a minute. You showed us two illustrations from the OT. We live in the NT age now, don't we? The OT may say that God is Holy, but the NT says He is Love, doesn't it? The NT doesn't emphasize the holiness of God. It emphasizes His Love."

Really? What about the Lord's prayer? How did Jesus say we are to approach God? Matthew 6:9 "Our Father...*hallowed be Thy Name.*"

This is key. Even in the NT, the most significant thing about God is His Holiness.

Do you want to learn how to pray? Start by acknowledging that God is Holy. Do you want to get a handle on your life? Get a handle on God's holiness.

God has given His church an ordinance to be a continual reminder of the great price He paid to deal with the great problem of our sin. In Communion we remember what the Holy God did to make it possible for sinners like us to be forgiven and declared righteous by Him.

Communion

Let's give Him thanks as we come to the table...

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] I am indebted to the teaching of R. C Sproul for many of the insights shared in this series of messages. I highly recommend his video series and book on the subject.

[2] Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, Vol. 2, p. 121.