

THIS IS WHAT THE LORD HAS COMMANDED

Leviticus 9:1-24

Key Verse: 9:6

Then Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you."

Many people decide to read the whole Bible but get stuck in the book of Leviticus. Genesis is interesting and so is Exodus. Then they are turned off by all the laws and regulations in Leviticus. Actually, this is a very important book. One missionary said that if he had to choose only three books in the Bible, Leviticus would be one of them--not Romans, not the gospels. I asked him why, and he simply said, "Because I see Jesus everywhere in the book." I also find this book to be very rewarding to study, as it teaches me who God is and how to approach him, and also how much he wants to get involved in our lives. Jesus quoted more verses from Leviticus than any other book in the Bible.

Leviticus Chapter 9 describes how the newly ordained priests led the first worship service at the new tabernacle. Worship is very important for believers. Do you know what we will be doing when we get to heaven? Billy Graham said education would be important in heaven. Others suggest that we would be driving nice cars on the streets of gold. We don't know. But one thing is certain--we will worship the Lamb as we learn in Revelation 5. Let us think about what God wants from us as we worship him and learn how we can truly worship him.

I. THE LORD WILL APPEAR TO YOU (1-6)

Look at verse 1. *"On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel."* This was a historic day for the Israelites. A full year had passed since they came out of Egypt. They were at the foot of Mt. Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments. God told him to build a sanctuary so that his people could come together and worship him. Finally, the tabernacle was completed with all the furnishings. Then Moses anointed Aaron and his sons to be priests (Lev 8:1-36). They were dressed in honor and beauty. They were anointed with oil. They were consecrated for seven days. Now on the eighth day, Moses summoned them to begin their priestly duty. It was the very first worship service Aaron served. It was a huge event, with two million Israelites gathered to worship the Lord. What did Moses tell the priests to do?

Look at verses 2-4. *He said to Aaron, "Take a bull calf for your sin offering and a ram for your burnt offering, both without defect, and present them before the Lord. Then say to the Israelites: "Take a male goat for a sin offering, a calf and a lamb—both a year old and without defect—for a burnt offering, and an ox and a ram for a fellowship offering to sacrifice before the Lord, together with a grain offering mixed with olive oil. For today the Lord will appear to you.""* The first thing Moses told Aaron and the Israelites to do in their worship was to bring their offerings to the Lord. Chapters 1-7 of Leviticus describe the detailed regulations of these offerings. So why did they have to bring offerings to worship the Lord? Their relationship with God was

broken because of their sin. The sinful people could not approach the holy God. But in his mercy, God opened a way for them to come to him. The sacrifices represented their repentance and prayer. They presented the sin offering and the burnt offering to say, “I am sorry,” and the fellowship offering and the grain offering to say, “Thank you.” The offerings were often called “an aroma pleasing to the Lord.” Later on, however, when the Israelites brought them habitually with no love in their hearts, God was not pleased. He said to them, “I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.... Stop bringing meaningless offerings!” (Isa 1:11,13). But we should remember that originally they brought the offerings to express their love and gratitude to God who had brought them out of their slavery in Egypt. They were like children who bring their birthday gifts to their parents with lots of love.

Look at verses 5-6. *They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the Lord. Then Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you.”* Offerings were important part of their worship service. But what’s really important was their obedience to the word of God. The phrase, “as the Lord has commanded,” is repeated several times in this chapter. We learn that obedience is at the heart of our worship. True worship requires obedience to the word of God.

Why does God want us to worship him as he has commanded? Why can’t we worship him anyway we like? To worship the Lord is to show our love for him for who he is. And to love him is to obey his words. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands” (Jn 14:15). When we think of worship, we usually think about going to church on Sunday, sing some praise songs, listen to message, and offer money to God. There is nothing wrong with this. The format of worship is not so important. Traditions are not so important. What is important is to worship him with all our hearts. Jesus says that God seeks worshipers who worship him in the Spirit and in truth. The problem is that we often worship him habitually and casually. A deep, heart-felt connection with God is missing. We go through the motion, and cannot wait until everything is over so we can go home to do what we like. I heard that a pastor in Florida decided to cut his worship service to 20 minutes so that his congregation (mostly tourists) could hit the beach early. We feel that we sacrifice a lot by worshipping God on Sundays, instead of watching football on TV or playing computer games. But the real worship requires obedience, not just on Sundays, but in every aspect of our lives.

The Prophet Samuel told King Saul, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice ...” (1Sa 15:22). Saul was a mighty warrior who defeated strong enemies such as Philistines and Amalekites. But God rejected him as king, because he violated the Lord’s command and instructions. On the other hand, David obeyed the word of God. King Saul was trying to hunt him down. David was running for his life, hiding in caves. He and his men couldn’t hold regular worship service in that situation. They couldn’t sing hymn songs loudly. But he obeyed the Lord at all cost. Once he heard that the Philistines were at Keilah stealing grain from the threshing floors. David understood the agony of his people and wanted to help them. His men advised him against this, because it was crazy to take on the Philistines while they were cornered by King Saul. But David inquired of the Lord twice.

And he obeyed the Lord (1Sa 23:4). Obedience pleases the Lord more than any expensive offerings.

II. MAKE ATONEMENT FOR YOURSELF AND THE PEOPLE (7-21)

In verse 7, *Moses said to Aaron, "Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded."* In Leviticus 8 Aaron and his sons were ordained by Moses through a solemn ceremony. Moses washed them with water and dressed them, from underwear all the way to headgear. He consecrated them by pouring oil on them. Then he offered a bull for their sin offering and a ram for the burnt offering, by slaughtering them, splashing the blood and burning them. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the heads of the animals before they were killed to confess that it was for their own sins the innocent animals were being sacrificed. Then Moses slaughtered another ram, put the blood on Aaron's ear, his thumb and his big toe. He then took loaves of unleavened bread and burned them with the animal fat on the altar as an ordination offering. He told Aaron and his sons not to leave the tabernacle for seven days. He said, "You must stay at the entrance to the tent of meeting day and night for seven days and do what the Lord requires, so you will not die; for that is what I have been commanded." Each day for seven days, Moses sacrificed a bull for their atonement (Ex 29:35-37). We can imagine that the newly ordained priests had intimate fellowship with the Lord during this time. No doubt they prayed a lot and meditated on the word of God.

Now Moses told them to offer animal sacrifices on their own for the first time. Let us look at verses 8-14 for the details of what they did: *"So Aaron came to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin offering for himself. His sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his finger into the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. On the altar he burned the fat, the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver from the sin offering, as the Lord commanded Moses; the flesh and the hide he burned up outside the camp. Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against the sides of the altar. They handed him the burnt offering piece by piece, including the head, and he burned them on the altar. He washed the internal organs and the legs and burned them on top of the burnt offering on the altar."*

For seven days, Moses had slaughtered a bull each day, sprinkled the blood and burned them for atonement. Then on this day, Aaron had to do it himself. Why? It is because sin makes it impossible for any person to approach God. To worship the Lord, sin has to be dealt with first. Aaron was the high priest. But he was a sinner. He was the first one to admit this. Whenever a young bull was sacrificed on the altar, his heart became heavy, remembering the golden calf he set up for the people to worship. He couldn't forgive himself. Perhaps some Israelites could not forgive him for what he had done. But the sacrifice of the innocent animals reminded them of God's grace of forgiveness. Aaron had to forgive himself. His people had to forgive him, because God had forgiven him.

Today, we don't have to bring any animal sacrifices to God for our atonement, because Jesus died on the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world—all our sins, once and for all. We are all sinners in need of forgiveness, including ministry leaders, perhaps especially leaders. Killing innocent animals for atonement reminds us of the seriousness of our sins. Most of all, the blood of Jesus reminds us of the indescribable gift of God's forgiveness. We can be a kingdom of priests because of this grace of forgiveness.

Next Aaron brought the offering that was for the people. He took the goat for the people's sin offering and slaughtered it and offered it for a sin offering as he did with the first one (15). Verse 16 says that he brought the burnt offering and offered it "in the prescribed way." Again it was important for him to follow the word of God exactly. In Chapter 10, we learn that something terrible happened to his sons, Nadab and Abihu. God killed them on the spot for offering unauthorized fire before the Lord, "contrary to his command" (10:1-2). God's word is no joke.

We wonder why God gave his people very detailed instructions and commanded them to follow exactly. Is the God of Leviticus like a state trooper who tries to catch us for violating the law? Nothing can be further from this. The Israelites were former slaves with slave mentality. They complained a lot about small inconveniences in their trip through the wilderness. They said they wanted to go back to Egypt. But God wanted them to be his treasured possession, a holy people, a kingdom of priests. Leviticus was a guidebook for the newly redeemed people to know how to approach him to worship the Holy God. He really wanted them to be his people. He wanted them to worship him and walk with him. So he gave detailed instructions and commanded them to follow. He wanted to be involved in every aspect of their lives. God wants to be involved in our lives. He also wants us to be with him in every part of our lives.

Let us see the details of what Aaron did in verses 17-21: *"He also brought the grain offering, took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning's burnt offering. He slaughtered the ox and the ram as the fellowship offering for the people. His sons handed him the blood, and he splashed it against the sides of the altar. But the fat portions of the ox and the ram—the fat tail, the layer of fat, the kidneys and the long lobe of the liver—these they laid on the breasts, and then Aaron burned the fat on the altar. Aaron waved the breasts and the right thigh before the Lord as a wave offering, as Moses commanded."*

These offerings were presented for the people. Every person needed atonement because everyone was a sinner. There was no exception, not even one. This is true with us today, even in a Christian community. God wants us to be a community of believers who love the Lord and love one another all the time. But we often hurt one another with words and deeds. We blame each other for small things. We quickly forget the kind things that our coworkers did for us, but remember some unkind things for a long, long time. The problem is that it is difficult to truly worship God together when we do this to one another. How can we overcome this serious problem? Again this passage reminds us that we have to deal with the sin problem. The leaders must repent before God and receive the grace of forgiveness by the blood of Jesus. Each member of the community

must also repent before God and receive the grace of forgiveness. When all of us do this, we can forgive one another. Forgiving is a difficult thing to do. It is easy for us to point out other people's sin problem, while we remain in sin. We may argue with one another to say things like, "Your sin is bad, and I am right," "No, your sin is worse, and I am right." Who is right? Actually, it does not matter who is right. Because sin is sin, no matter how big or small. All sins break our relationship with God. The good news is that God sacrificed his one and only Son Jesus to forgive all our sins—sins of past, present and future. All we need to do is to put our hands on the Lamb of God as we repent our sins and receive the grace of forgiveness. When we do this, we can truly worship the Lord together as a community. We will have no problem reciting together the Lord's Prayer that says, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation" (Lk 11:4).

III. THE GLORY OF THE LORD APPEARED (22-24)

Look at verse 22. *Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down.* It had been a long day for Aaron and the people. He began to make sacrifices in the morning (17). The worship service continued all day long. Killing even one bull calf alone probably took several hours. It was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. I have no experience in killing a big animal. Growing up in a farmer's family, I had to kill a chicken whenever guest came. I hated the duty. I had to catch a chicken, twist its neck, and pluck the feathers. Afterwards, I had no appetite for the chicken soup. But Aaron had to kill, de-skin, cut, clean the internal organs, wash them, and burn some parts on the altar and other parts outside the camp. He did this for a young bull and a ram for himself, and a goat, a calf, a lamb, an ox, and another ram for the people on that day. His beautiful ephod was soaked with blood and sweat. He also offered a grain offering mixed with olive oil. Wow! I heard that the retirement age of the priests was 50. It was not easy to be a priest, as he had to kill hundreds, if not thousands, of animals in his lifetime. Anyway, finally Aaron was done with his priestly duties for the day. He lifted his hands and blessed the people before stepping down.

Then what happened? Look at verses 23-24. *Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.* Moses and Aaron went into the tent of the meeting, probably to pray. They were also thankful that they and the people had done everything exactly as the Lord had commanded. They came out and blessed the people. Then something spectacular happened. The glory of the Lord appeared to them. Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. People were so happy that they shouted for joy and fell facedown in reverence. It had been a long day for everyone. But they were happy to know that God accepted their worship. It was real worship for them as they experienced the presence of God.

How does this compare to our worship service today? Everything about the worship on that day was real. The blood was real. The smoke from the burnt offering was real. Above all, the presence of God was real. How about our worship? Is our worship too intellectual? Is it too emotional? Do we experience the fire of the Holy Spirit moving our hearts? Do we shout for joy for the presence of the Lord among us? How can our worship be real? I pray that this passage may help us to answer these questions honestly so that we may be true worshipers of God. May God help us to experience his presence through the fire of the Holy Spirit as we worship him!