

Prepare to Serve a Holy God [Slide 1] Leviticus 8-9

If we are followers of Jesus Christ, then for better or for worst we represent God to those who know us. What does a holy God expect from those who serve him and represent him to others? How do we prepare ourselves to serve God? I will answer those questions today.

In my overview of the book of Leviticus I pointed out that the book talks about three things necessary for God to dwell in the midst of his people. They must perform certain sacred rituals, the sacrifices we covered in chapters 1-7 and the annual feasts in Chapters 23-27. Second, the people must have priests who mediate between them and a holy God. I will talk about the ordination of the priests today in chapters 8-9 and about the standards for priests in Leviticus 21-22. Third, the people must follow the ritual purity laws and the moral purity laws. The Day of Atonement provided a sacrifice for all unintentional sins, which no one was aware of.

[Slide 2] Before we get into the details of chapters 8-9, I want to talk about the application issue that arises here. We have no direct equivalent to the priesthood in New Testament times. We don't offer sacrifices today. We don't maintain a temple. We don't have a group that pronounces lepers or buildings clean of leprosy. Most of the functions of the OT priests have either ended or they were fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

One way we could apply Leviticus 8-9 is by discussing how Jesus fulfills the role of the OT priest. We could talk about how his ministry is far superior to their ministry. We could talk about how he is the perfect priest and High priest in contrast to his earthly forbears. The book of Hebrews does that very thing, devoting a number of chapters to discussing how Jesus is our great High Priest and how the order of Melchizedek, to which Jesus belongs, is far superior to the Levitical priesthood. We may do some of that comparison when we get to chapters 21-22.

There is another way in which we can apply this material about priests. The Old Testament described Israel as a nation of priests to the other nations. Look at Exodus 19:5-6 on your outline. Read. God chose the Jews out of all the peoples of the world to be his holy nation and a kingdom of priests to the other nations. Every Israelite was supposed to be a priest to the Gentiles, to the non-Jews. How could he be a priest when he could not offer any sacrifices, were not allowed to serve in the tabernacle or later in the Temple, and could not do most of the things that the Levitical priests could do? How were ordinary Israelites priests?

In a general sense, a priest is someone who represents God to the people and represents the people to God. So, when a priest proclaimed that your sins were purified as a result of your purification offering, he was standing in for God. He was declaring God's truth on behalf of God. He represented God in the truth he proclaimed to the people.

He represented the people to God. The people were not allowed to touch the altar or enter the holy place or touch the sacred utensils, so when the priest offered the blood on the altar of sacrifice or he sprinkled blood on the veil in the holy or holies or on the altar of incense, he represented the people to God when he did that. He acted as an intermediary between God and the people. He would pray on behalf of the people and represent the people that way to God.

Every Israelite could act like a priest to a Gentile by representing God to them, declaring God's will and truth to them and could represent them to God by praying for them. In this way every man, woman and child could be a priest of God to a non-Jew.

The apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:9-12 quotes this passage in Exodus and applies it to the church. Let's read that passage. Read. Peter says we represent God to people by proclaiming the excellencies of the One who called us out of darkness into light. We declare God's greatness.

While we do that, we must represent God well. In verse 11 Peter tells us to abstain from fleshly lusts and in verse 12 to keep our behavior so excellent among the Gentiles that even when they might slander us, that they instead end up glorifying God on account of our good deeds.

So, this is the approach I'm going to take with Leviticus 8-9. What can we learn from the ordination of the priests that we can apply to our lives as representatives of holy God?

On your outline I've summarized the ordination process for Aaron and his sons. The consecration of Aaron and his sons was a public event conducted at the door of the tabernacle. First, Aaron and his sons washed with water. They probably had undergarments on and washed all of their exposed skin. Moses clothed Aaron in his tunic and sash along with a robe, the ephod and breast piece. He placed on Aaron's head a turban that held a gold plate on the front. Then Moses took anointing oil and sprinkled it on the tabernacle, on the altar of sacrifice, the wash basin, and on Aaron's head.

Then Moses clothed Aaron's sons with tunics and sashes and put caps on their heads. Moses offered up a bull for a purification offering killing it after Aaron and his sons placed their hands on it. Moses poured the blood on the altar, burned the fat, the liver and kidney and burned the rest of the bull outside the camp. So, the first offering for the priests was the purification offering. They needed to be purified from all the effects of their sin. Both the washing in water and the sacrifice of the purification offering emphasized that God's representative needed to be holy and cleansed of sin.

[Slide 3] So, let me make the first application to us with this general principle. If you are going to represent God, act like God. In this age of Facebook and other social media, this principle is greatly needed because when people don't have to speak to other people face to face such as is the case on social media, they tend to lose their inhibitions and become more crass, more insulting, and more verbally abusive. We who are Christians cannot represent God that way. God deserves and demands representatives that act like him.

It is real easy to get angry at something you read and then communicate out of anger in a way that is disrespectful or demeaning to other people. God says that the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God, so you have to let go of your anger before you communicate as God's representative. Give it a day or two and if you're still angry, don't write. It's not worth whatever points you might score.

If you represent God, you cannot take a contrary position to God. I'm flabbergasted at the number of people who claim to be Christians and then write in favor of gay marriage, usually claiming that people should have equal rights. Both the OT and NT clearly teach that homosexual behavior is sin against God. Why would Christians argue for people having legal benefits for sinning against God? Don't rights come from God? Isn't that what the Declaration of Independence asserts that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? If God is the true source of human rights then why would any Christian assert that God has decreed that people have the legal right to form a union contrary to God's will? We know that God allows people the freedom to disobey him, but he never makes a right out of sin. He never suggests sin is something to be cherished and protected.

Here are some other ways we need to represent God. Don't put Christian bumper stickers on your car and then drive discourteously. Don't present your business as a Christian business and

then cheat or mistreat your customers or your employees. Don't bring your children to church and then act like the Devil the rest of the week to them. Don't claim to be a Christian and then gossip about or shun your fellow students. Don't claim to be a Christian and then demean someone with a different skin color or accent or heritage. If you are going to represent God, then act like God. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and not the leading of the flesh.

Let's continue with Aaron and his sons' consecration to the Lord. After the purification offering, Moses then sacrificed a ram as a whole burnt offering for Aaron and his sons after they laid hands on it. Moses poured the blood on the altar of sacrifice, cut the ram in pieces and burned it. Then he took a second ram which was the ram of ordination. After Aaron and his sons placed their hands on it, Moses killed it, and put some blood on Aaron's right ear, thumb on his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. Most commentators suggest the blood on those three body parts emphasized that the priest was to listen to God with his ear, serve in the tabernacle with his hands, and walk before God with his feet. Moses took the fat, liver, kidneys, right thigh and some unleavened cakes and waved those items as a wave offering before God before burning them on the altar.

The final step on that first day was the peace offering. Moses took some of the anointing oil and the blood on the altar of sacrifice and sprinkled it on Aaron, his sons, and their clothing. Then Aaron and his sons took the rest of the second ram and boiled it and ate it with the unleavened bread at the door of the tabernacle to celebrate their reconciliation with God and their first day of consecration.

Aaron and his sons were to remain in the doorway of the tent of meeting for seven days and each day Moses would offer the same sacrifices on their behalf. The text does not make clear what provision existed for restroom breaks. There must have been some kind of provision made, but we don't know what it was.

So, the sequence of sacrifices was the purification offering to remove the effects of sin, the whole burnt offering to dedicate the whole person to God, and the peace offering to celebrate reconciliation with God and what had been accomplished in their consecration that day.

[Slide 4] I offer to you a second suggested application because it strikes me that the order of sacrifices might provide a good daily model for us. Purify, serve, celebrate. In the morning you begin the day with purification by confessing any sin and asking God to cleanse you of all unrighteousness. If you shower in the morning or brush your teeth you can use those activities as a reminder and object lesson. "God as I cleanse my body, would you cleanse my soul of all unrighteousness?"

During the day you offer the whole burnt offering of doing everything for the glory of God. As you work, as you study or shop, as you run errands, as you clean, whatever it is you do during the day, you do it as unto God, looking for opportunities to love people in the name of Jesus or to share truth with them.

Then in the evening, around the dinner table would be quite fitting, take time to celebrate what God has done that day and thank him for those things. I suppose if you take your shower before you go to bed then you could start the purification at the end of the day. It strikes me that this would be a good daily routine or ritual to enhance our personal worship. Purify, serve, celebrate.

Leviticus chapter 9 described what happens on the eighth day after Aaron and his sons had been at the tabernacle for a whole week and Moses had offered the sacrifices every day. On the eighth day Aaron offers the sacrifices for the first time. Moses instructs Aaron to offer a calf for the purification offering and a ram for the burnt offering for himself, then to offer a male goat for

a purification offering and a calf and lamb for a whole burnt offering for the congregation followed by an ox and ram for a peace offering.

In verse 6 Moses tells Aaron to do all this which the Lord commanded so that the glory of the Lord may appear to you. In verses 7-21 Aaron carries out Moses' instructions. When he was done, Aaron blessed the people, that is he called upon God to bless them. Then he and Moses went into the tabernacle and when they came out both of them blessed the people at which point the glory of the Lord appeared to everyone. The glory of the Lord was probably some kind of brilliant flash of light.

[Slide 5] What do we learn here? God's blessing comes after our obedience. Or to put it another way: our obedience releases God's blessing. A holy God cannot bless disobedience, but he delights to bless obedience.

When I do premarital counseling, usually I will ask the couple if they are sleeping together and if so, I will challenge them to quit and practice purity until their marriage. Why do I do that? I do that because God doesn't bless disobedience and every marriage desperately needs God's blessing in order to last and be a good, healthy relationship. You don't ever want to start something by disobeying God. No, you want a good foundation of harmony with God on which to build a marriage and you don't get that by starting your relationship at the beginning with rebellion against God.

If you want God to bless your business or your career, then you need to be a person of integrity who treats people with courtesy and respect. If you want God to bless your studies, then you need to practice honesty in your test taking and you need to stand firm against any teaching that denies God's truth or his moral will. If a congregation wants God's blessing then it needs to act in love within, love others without, live a righteous life without hypocrisy, and hold to God's truth. Surprisingly, some people seem to expect God to bless them even when they don't obey him. It doesn't work that way.

Some don't attend church and then get upset at God when they face life crises as if they expected God to bless them with an easy life in spite of their disobedience. Some attend church but then live contrary to the Bible the rest of the week, but can't figure out why their life is disintegrating. Some withhold their money or give very stingily and then wonder why they have so much trouble making financial ends meet. Some do little to serve God or to live out their faith and then are surprised when their children rebel against God. Hear me carefully, I'm not saying that if you obey God you will never face any of these problems. That's not true. God's ways are complex and they include also the decisions of others that affect us.

I am saying this and claiming this. If you live a life of obedience you will face fewer problems than you would have, and you will experience many more serendipities of God's blessings if you obey him. You will have to trust that what I have said is true, because I can't prove it to you experimentally, but I can assure you of these basic truths: God blesses obedience and he does not bless disobedience. How he actually works that out in each life I can't tell you. At the end, Aaron was able to bless after he obeyed. God showed his glory to his people after they carried out all his requirements for consecrating the priests.

Moses told Aaron to do what the Lord commanded so that the glory of the Lord would appear. The purpose or result of obedience was that God showed his glory to his people.

These then are valid applications for you. If you're going to represent God, act like God. Practice a daily cycle of purify, serve, and celebrate. Finally, your obedience releases God's blessing, because if you are a disciple of Jesus, then you are his priest to others, representing God to them and representing them to God.