

...AND AARON WAS SILENT.

©by Jeff Borden –Feb 21, 2009

Part of my meditation this week has included “Minding the Inner Life” (see [Salvation that Transforms](#)). In this meditation, Pastor Kang, reminds us that the heart is the wellspring of life and teaches that spiritual formation means “**cultivating the heart.**” As I have reflected and meditated on this teaching, my daily Bible reading has served to bring insight helpful in understanding how much the heart of a man can stand as an obstacle to advancing in the ways of Christ or serve as a catalyst and encourager for transformation to His image.

...daily reading: The last couple weeks have been taking me through the books of Exodus and Leviticus. There have been several points that have been helpful in illustrating the fickleness of the human heart. We are so incredibly quick to flip-flop our attentions and our memory seems very limited, or short, when it concerns the lessons of God versus the desires of our heart. Before I go any further, I should make clear some of the things standing out in my own memory that have been fueling my thoughts.

Scripture Considerations:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve.”

Proverbs 4:20-27 My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body. Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. Avoid all perverse talk; stay away from corrupt speech. Look straight ahead, and fix your eyes on what lies before you. Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil.

“So two opposing impulses reside in our hearts: both sinister darkness and heavenly light. Earthly things dwell there, things that contradict God, and also spiritual things that bring forth peace. To cultivate this inner being, we must take time to make keen observations. Spiritual discipline involves the careful cultivation of the heart. Without it we cannot present pure hearts to God.” (Joshua Choonmin Kang)

Leviticus 11:44-45 “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground. I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”

1 Peter 1:13-16 So think clearly and exercise self-control. Look forward to the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”

So, in addition to *Deep-Rooted in Christ* and my daily Bible reading there are the above mentioned passages of scripture that are “poking” at my heart and causing me to reflect upon how we (I) consider the instructions, precepts, and holiness of God...especially how it all relates to my life in general and the life I live everyday...sanctified and consecrated to Him.

A couple of weeks ago I was reading in Exodus. Moses receives God’s call from the burning bush (Exodus 3) and experiences a life-changing moment in the presence of God as God speaks personally to him. God converses with Moses...answering questions, allowing Moses to debate His instructions, and finally sharing with Moses what no man has known before...the personal and holy Name of God, Y__H the great **I AM**. God as much as denies Moses any refusal for His plan to deliver Israel from Egypt and Moses, finally, reluctantly agrees (Exodus 4:1-23). On a scale that probably exceeds the average person, Moses has encountered the glory of God, has spoken with Him and received direct revelation and knowledge from Him. Something beyond understanding happens next (Exodus 4:24-26). After this unbelievable encounter with God, (where God was adamant that Moses was His man for the mission)...God almost kills Moses (*“the LORD confronted Moses and was about to kill him”*). These encounters stand completely opposite one another and are difficult to explain. I don’t want to get off on another discussion, but I think the issue here was Moses’ knowledge of God’s instruction regarding the Abrahamic Covenant and circumcision. It is evident that Moses’ son was not circumcised according to the instruction given to Abraham by God. What is relevant for this particular study is that Moses knew what should have been done. Moses had experienced the presence and glory of God firsthand... I think Moses underestimated the “otherness” and Holiness of God. He certainly underestimated what his own response to God should have been.

Time passes from the account of Exodus 3-4 and the incredible deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Other miraculous manifestations of God occur in the desert and Moses receives the instructions of the Law and Commandments of God. We arrive at the instructions for living that are detailed in the Book of Leviticus and this is where I make my next observation, but let me set this up a little better...

Throughout the instructions given to Moses in the later chapters of Exodus and the Book of Leviticus, God spells out in meticulous detail what He wants and how He wants it. God spares nothing in explaining how things should be built, people should behave, and how people must respond to His holiness. He spells out with blunt explicitness that if His words are not obeyed, people will be “cutoff” and death can be the result of not following His instruction...this, He explains, will happen equally whether from open disobedience or blind ignorance. **The bottom line:** *being in relationship with God is serious business.*

Ok, Leviticus... Yeah, (Leviticus 9:23-24) *“Then Moses and Aaron went into the Tabernacle, and when they came back out, they blessed the people again, and the glory of the LORD appeared to the whole community. **Fire blazed forth from the LORD's presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When the people saw this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground.**”*

A fabulously wonderful blessing of God’s Presence before the entire community of Israel takes place here. God shows His pleasure and acceptance of the people by consuming their offering to Him. Aaron has followed the instructions God gave to Moses down to the last detail. This account in particular begins the work of the Levitical-Aaronic Priesthood. Aaron has performed the sacrifices of atonement and purification for his sins and the people of Israel’s sins. God is pleased; all is good...all is glorious. The people worship in the presence of God.

The **very next account** (don't know if this takes place the same day or sometime shortly after) tells of Aaron's sons performing their priestly duties. It reads as follows:

*Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over them. In this way, **they disobeyed the LORD** by burning before him the wrong kind of fire, different than he had commanded. **So fire blazed forth from the LORD's presence and burned them up, and they died there before the LORD.***
(Leviticus 10:1-2)

It doesn't say, but you gotta think that Nadab and Abihu were there when "fire blazed forth from the LORD's presence and consumed the burnt offering." We also think that these sons of Aaron had been instructed in how serious their duties were in the tabernacle service. Yet, for whatever reason, they do not take their role as seriously as they should. Their error cost them their lives...the same fire that consumed the burnt offering consumed them. They do not get a "do-over" for this negligence. The next passage of scripture leads me to believe that Moses and Aaron witnessed this "consuming fire" of God. Verse three, immediately follows "and they died there before the LORD;" it reads as follows:

*Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD meant when he said, 'I will display my holiness through those who come near me. I will display my glory before all the people.'" **And Aaron was silent.***

It seems that Moses "comforts" Aaron in a most insensitive fashion... I cannot help but see images of Aaron in my own mind's eye standing there slack-jawed, eyes agape with disbelief as his sons lie in a still smoking and smoldering heap on the Tabernacle floor. **And Aaron was silent.**

Had Aaron been forthright in his instructions to Nadab and Abihu? Who was responsible for this negligence and does it matter? More importantly, what can I glean from this account?

As I have pondered this passage and stirred it into the mix of the other items percolating in my brain from this week, my first inclination is to leap toward legalism; this seems the safe bet to me. Gimme a set of rules that are spelled out in black and white and send me on my way. On the other hand, **me plus law** equals "stony heart" and then I end up like Nadab and/or Abihu.

My next thought brings me to immeasurable guilt because I know I don't take God's holiness seriously; at least not as seriously as I should. I haven't seen anyone ever be consumed by holy fire. I haven't seen the ground open up and swallow people. I haven't seen people be instantly consumed by leprosy or any other of the host of judgments that God meted out on people from the Biblical narrative. My guilt drives me back to desiring the "safety of legalism," but I know that is not safe at all...it only offers me a slow death as opposed to the violent end visited upon Nadab and Abihu.

What then, is my solution? The heart...it is what Pastor Kang spoke of in the meditation from this week. It is what God speaks to Ezekiel about, it is shared as the Wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs, and it is the pervasive teaching throughout the gospels and the apostolic writings of the first century church. Our hearts need replaced, trained, and forever guarded. We cannot afford to be complacent. We cannot afford not to... Wait. **Wait a minute; my heart needs replaced. My heart needs trained** and forever guarded. **I cannot afford to be complacent.** I'm sure there are others that will find themselves in the same place as I am, but for now **I have to understand that God** commands me to be holy as He is holy. God commands me to acknowledge His way over my own. Is there grace in all this? Absolutely! The problem is that I am prone to trample grace by excusing my sin and not acknowledge the holiness of God or truly believe that His command for me to "be holy" is meant as a serious directive. Aaron missed it...Nadab and Abihu died for it. When it was said and done, nothing else could be said or done...**Aaron was silent.**

Grant us, even us, O Lord, to know you, and love you and rejoice in you. And if we cannot do these perfectly in this life, let us, at least, advance to higher degrees every day, till we can come to do them in perfection. Let the knowledge of you increase in us here, that it may be full hereafter. Let the love of you grow every day more and more here, that it may be perfect hereafter; that our joy may be great in itself and full in you. We know, O God, that you are a God of truth. O make good your gracious promises to us, that our joy may be full. To your honor and glory, who with the Father and Holy Spirit lives and reigns one God, world without end. Amen. Augustine

Help me, O Lord, to receive your grace in a loving response. Teach me, O Lord, to guard and train my heart...as I learn to follow you with all my "heart, soul, mind, and strength."