

February 12, 2012

## *Fueling The Fire*

Leviticus 6:12-13

### Introduction:

- ❖ The Hebrew Handbook Of Religious Rites, Rituals And Morals
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## *Scripture References*

Leviticus 6:12-13

Jeremiah 20:9

Matthew 25:1-13

II Timothy 1:6, 7

Revelation 2:4, 5

Hebrews 13:15

Luke 10:30-37

I John 1:7

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**Leviticus 6:12-13**

I was thinking as I prepared this study about how quickly I've learned to depend on visual graphics to reinforce what I say in a sermon. Actually, preachers and teachers have always used some kind of audio/visual system.

You remember when Jesus wrote in the dirt while talking to the Pharisees about the woman caught in adultery. Whatever he wrote seems to have driven the point home, because when he finished they had been driven away. Jesus was a master of illustration in his teaching.

When I was a kid, preachers used a blackboard, a piece of chalk and a pointer. Some of them really got fancy by using colored chalk. I was never artistic enough for that.

Then we moved on to overhead projection, and some inventive minds began to develop other methods of using visuals.

During the Joy Bus days we used skits liberally. Several times Bart Hendrix was wrapped in toilet paper and waited in the back room for whoever played Jesus to raise him from the dead.

But here's a true example of creative audio/visual work that I was reminded of by the title of today's study—**which is "Fueling the Fire"**

In one large youth worship gathering, the leader recreated the offerings on the Jewish altar by building a fire on the communion table—it got out of hand and burned the table down. I've upgraded to Katie and our projector and I feel safe there.

I don't suppose many of you have committed our text to memory.

If I were to take a poll of the least read Bible books among us, I'm guessing that Leviticus might place somewhere near the top. I, for one, spend less time in this book than most of the others.

Leviticus is one of the first five books of the Old Testament, referred to as the Torah in Hebrew, The Pentateuch in Greek, or the books of Moses.

It is a handbook for the priests and Levites outlining their duties in worship, and it is a guidebook of holy living for the Hebrews:

This is how you make an offering, this is how you conduct worship, this is how you conduct your personal lives and how you conduct society.

It goes into great detail about what is acceptable and what isn't -- down to the kinds of clothes you wear, the

food you eat, and how you deal with certain health issues.

Today, when people want to discredit Christianity, or discredit the Bible, they'll often quote from Leviticus, using one of these obscure verses that deal with treating skin rashes or something like that and they say, "How can you believe this nonsense is the Word of God?"

The truth is that there are rules in Leviticus that we no longer need to follow -- for example, we don't make burnt offerings or sacrifices, and we can eat shrimp, and it's ok to blend cotton and wool.

These restrictions were necessary in the Old Covenant. They were part of the process of God revealing himself to his people, but they don't apply to us today -- not in a literal sense.

They are, however, in some way, **prophetic**. They suggest a spiritual application of God's presence with us, his promises to us and his expectations of us today.

So, in introducing this study, I want you to see that as we read about sacrifices and offerings, God can speak to us through what these things symbolize, and it can help us be more devoted to him today.

Some time ago I talked to you about what we call "Type and Ante-Type" of "Shadow and Substance." There's a lot of "shadow" in the OT. But now the Substance has been revealed in Jesus as he walks beside us every day.

I know you're aware of the Bible's frequent use of fire as being a symbol of spiritual life and a permanent relationship with God—

**Jeremiah**, who called the word of God a indistinguishable fire in his bones, the **5 Virgins** who couldn't go to the wedding because they let their lamps go out,

**Timothy** who was urged to fan his fire into flame. Through John, Jesus told the **Ephesians** that their lamps were dim and urged them to return to their first love.

Today, a look farther back in the history of God's dealings with those he was shaping into being his people.

A good example can be found in Leviticus 6. God is speaking to Moses about how to administer the various types of offering -- the guilt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering -- and I want you to listen to what he said to Moses about the burnt offering.

***(v. 12-13) The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it. The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.***

When I read this verse earlier this week, I began thinking about how important it is to keep the fire burning in our lives.

Here's an historical illustration:

*Back in the 1700's there was a young man named Robert Robinson. In his late teens Robert was living a wild lifestyle. He was a real party animal. But at 22 years old, after hearing a powerful sermon by a popular preacher, he repented and studied to become a minister. He is best known today for the hymn, "Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing." You can tell from that song that his conversion was sincere.*

*But while Robert changed his worldly lifestyle, his attitudes as a minister found him in conflict with the church. The story is told that years later, he was riding in a stagecoach and a lady was singing "Come Thou fount." She asked Robert what he thought of the song. He said, "Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give 1000 worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I had then."*

It's significant to me that **one line of "Come Thou Fount," should have forewarned Robert.** It says,

***"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;  
Seal it for thy courts above."***

The greatest tragedy I see in the Christian life is that I know so many people who, years ago, were fueled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, fueled by the fire of love for the lost, fueled by the fire of vision, fueled by the fire of purpose, and when I see them today, they have no fire.

At least no spiritual fire. Their lives have become comfortable -- and I don't mean that in the good sense of the word.

Their lives have become mundane. Their lives have become average. It's become more about going through the motions than turning the world upside down.

Someone told me about a preacher asking this question more than thirty years ago: ***"When was your best day with Jesus? If it wasn't this week, do something about it."*** That's a question we need to keep answering.

What was he saying? He was saying, "Don't let the fire go out. Keep the fire of your relationship with Christ burning in your life, every day of your life."

This should be a lifelong goal for us: to be just as enthusiastic about serving Christ and knowing Christ and living for Christ as we were back when we began. I hope

it's your ambition, otherwise I guarantee that just being religious will become a resented burden.

As I looked at these verses in Leviticus earlier this week, some of the symbolism of these words came to mind, and so today I'll share these thoughts with you, as we look at ***“How To Keep The Fire Burning”***.

There are **three things God said to Moses in this context that speak to us today**. Here's the **first thing we need to look at**. If you want to keep the fire burning in your life ...

### **1. Start your day focused on the fire.**

Back on the farm during my childhood, stoking the fire was a high priority in the morning. On winter mornings we couldn't just turn up the thermostat.

We couldn't prepare breakfast by simply pushing a button or adjusting a knob on the stove. There was no legal requirement to build the fire first—but, we did it, as they say, “religiously.”

Notice the first phrase that God spoke to Moses.

***(v. 12) Every morning the priest is to add firewood...***

**Every morning**, he says. Every morning you refuel the fire. It's the first thing you do each day: You take care of the fire.

That's because morning is the most important time of the day. It sets the tone for the rest of the day. Here's what I've noticed: what I focus on in the morning tends to reflect my priorities, and it tends to determine my priorities.

When I wake up in the morning, if all I can think about is what's happening financially or what's happening in the news or what am I going to eat -- that tells me where my priorities are and it tells me I need to make a strategic shift.

If I begin my day thinking about material things, it tends to set my direction for the rest of the day. If I wake up wanting anything other than fellowship with God, then I realize that I need to add some fuel to the fire, right away. That means some kind of early morning devotions.

The goal is not to juice up my emotions, because that rarely happens at that hour. Remember that youth camp and bus song we used to sing?

"I woke up this morning with my mind centered on Jesus." That's not me. If my mind is centered on anything, it's on how sleepy I still am.

The goal is, rather, to consciously redirect my attitude, so that I am focused on God, and his presence in my life, and his will for my life.

Over the years I've known more people than I care to count who have drifted away from the Christian life -- people that I would have thought were holier than me, more committed than me, more grounded in the Word than me.

And I've often wondered, "What happened? Why did they drift away, and not me?" I also faltered—always have, repeatedly—but I can't imagine not being here the rest of my life. I think the answer has to do with this specific spiritual practice.

**Here's something I've told a few of you before but it's too good not to share in this context: Charles Hodge** tells about a man who has given God the **first hour of every day for over 50 years**—thirty minutes in **prayer**, and thirty minutes in **Bible study**.

Brother Hodge says, *"I cannot say that. How about you?"*

*Herein is my greatest failure. This man saw God before he met man. He solved his problems before they arrived. To him, this was the most important hour of the day! Find God first! That was the power of Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Paul, and Jesus. It can be our power too!"*

I'm not at all suggesting that you need a half hour a day in prayer, but you need more than "Thank you for my breakfast this morning—and please don't let me get stuck in traffic and be late for work."

Half an hour of study in the morning is realistic for most of us—letting God speak to us as we start the day. And my emphasis in this point is not how long we pray or read—but that this is the way we start the day.

It should be our habit to begin the day with God. No matter what yesterday was like, no matter what we fear what challenges today might bring—we'll manage all of life better if we begin each new day with God.

There's a security factor here—the simple truth is that you can't drift too far in a day. If you start every day with God, you will not fall away.

I was reading an article recently about marriage that talked about the three most important times of the day for married couples.

The article said that the most important time of the day for a couple is first thing in the morning. It said that the way you interact with your spouse between the time you wake up and the time you leave for work sets the tone for your relationship for the rest of the day.

That's true of any intimate relationship. And that's why I suggest that you begin each day with praise. Yes, you've got tons of problems to complain about, and you can give your attention to them later on.

First things first. Start your day in the presence of God. Fuel the fire of your relationship with him and it will give you the priority system and motive to do the same in other relationships in which you want to keep the fire burning.

Before leaving this point, I want to reinforce the fact that what we're saying about continually putting fresh fuel on the fire of your relationship with God applies in exactly the same way to any relationship that is precious to you.

And I want you to understand that while the basic fuel you begin with—commitment and love and patience and forbearance and fellowship will continue to be used, time and growth and maturity and circumstance will influence how you apply the that basic kind of fuel.

Here's what I mean. A requirement of keeping the fire of your commitments of love and caring burning is to **adjust it to changing situations of time and growth.**

The needs of our loved ones will be affected by both natural and unpredictable changes. Some of these developments will be joyful—rewarding your love. Some will be painfully demanding, testing your profession of love and your “forever after” promises.

You loved your husband or wife when life was mostly romance. That's certainly as it should be when you decide to embark on a new, untried adventure together.

My advice is if you don't like each other much to begin with—if you don't like being together—don't start on this sacred journey together. If you'd rather play pool or watch sports with the guys, don't drag her along for a life of playing second fiddle.

So, you love each other and plan to experience all of life together. If you plan to grow old together, you may be inspired by Robert Brownings' romantic commitment to Elizabeth Barrett Browning

*"Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made. Our times are in his hand who saith, 'A whole I planned, youth shows but half; Trust God: See all, nor be afraid!'"*

But you don't love him or her in the way you did during courtship and the early years of marriage. **While romance is still precious, it's not enough.** During the decades that have passed since then, both of you have emerging needs.

These needs, pleasant or painful, demand that you love and care for each other in ways you never have before.

Your "for better or for worse" vows may now be defined—in relationships with husband or wife or children or friends—in ways they have never been presented before.

You loved your children when they were infants and you loved them as teens and now you love them as adults. But loving is no longer expressed by spoon feeding or

walking the floor with them in your arms while they scream.

Loving and caring for your children as adults does not involve changing diapers or reminding them to take a bath and brush their teeth.

It doesn't require setting limits for them. It doesn't require curfews or grounding or making sure they get to school every morning and do their homework at night.

But you can keep the fire of love and caring burning bright at every stage of life if you're faithful in applying fuel every day and refreshing it in the morning

Here's the second thing I want us to see. In order to keep the fire burning, not only must we fuel the fire thing in the morning, but secondly ...

**2. Arrange the fire each day according to the needs you expect the fire to satisfy today.**

Listen to the second phrase God spoke to Moses.

***(v. 12) Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire.***



None of us has ever seen a burnt offering, but we have seen a backyard cookout. Think about how you do it.

Once you get the fire going, you continuously arrange the burger and hot dogs or steaks on the grill so that they get the right amount of heat in order to cook evenly.

You do this because you don't want them charred on the outside and raw on the inside. So you move them around as necessary until everything is evenly cooked.

This burger's done, so you can move it to the back of the grill. Move this other burger forward so that it gets the fire it needs, too.

It's a pretty simple process. That's why men were able to figure it out. And it's why we're the ones always in charge of cooking outdoors.

The symbolism that I see in these words spoken to Moses is that we need to arrange each area of our lives as well, so that our lives are a full, balanced, living sacrifice to God.

What do we offer to God? **One type of offering we make to God is through praise.**

***Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. (Hebrews 13:15)***

God is pleased when you praise him. And here's a crucial distinction to make. You don't praise God with your feelings.

You praise him with your words. You praise him with your attitude. Even if your feelings aren't where you want them to be, you can still praise him, honoring him with words and attitude.

***Another way we make an offering to God is through service.*** Whatever God's will for your life may be, you can be sure that it involves helping people.

When you help people, when you serve people, you please God. It should be the goal of every Christian to have an area of ministry -- a place where you serve.

Also, every Christian should be on the lookout for those spontaneous opportunities to serve. Don't wait for the church to give you a title and an assignment.

As you're traveling through your day, you may come across unplanned and unexpected **"good Samaritan"**

opportunities to respond to someone's need for support or help

God puts them there. Providentially, he puts you in contact with them. Responding to their need is your way of making a sacrificial offering to God.

Here's the third thing all of us need to do. You fuel the fire first thing in the morning. You arrange each day according to the fire. And thirdly...

### **3. Feed the flame with the fat of fellowship.**

*(v. 12) Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it.*

Think of the backyard grill again. What happens when the fat of the meat starts dripping on the fire? It feeds the flame, doesn't it? In the very same way, fellowship feeds the flame of your spiritual life.

We weren't made to be hermits. We were made for community. We were made to live together, in relationship with one another. When you fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ, you fuel and fan the flame.

That's why, sometimes, it's a great idea for believers to get together -- not for a worship service or a work project, but simply for the pleasure of being together.

Simply for the pleasure of uplifting conversation, encouraging one another, laughing together, crying together, experiencing one another.

Don't let anyone tell you that Christian social fellowship, and home or in the building, is not one of the so called "items of worship."

This, like all things, needs to be a balanced part of our lives, because we get things from fellowship with other believers that we can get nowhere else.

Sometimes, however, what Christians call fellowship isn't really fellowship. It's a gossip-about-who-isn't-here session or a gripe-about-the-church session. This isn't pleasing to God.

You may have heard the old story about 3 ministers of different denominations in a small town. One day one of them said to the other two, "Each week we all spend so much time listening to the personal challenges facing the members of our congregations. But we don't have anyone to confide in about our own personal struggles. We

should get together and share what is troubling us." They agreed, and set up a specific time for their Minister's Fellowship Hour.

At the first meeting, one minister said, "I'm so ashamed of this—I've never told anyone about it—I can't seem to control my resentment toward several members of my flock." And he named them.

The second minister said, "I have a weakness for stretching the truth—sometimes even lying in my conversations and sermons about exciting experiences of other preachers—claiming them for myself. Please pray for me."

The third minister just sat in silence. Finally, the first two pressured him to lay it all out, as they had done. He said, "Fellas, my greatest weakness is uncontrollable gossip—and I just can't wait to get out of here." That was both the first and final meeting of the Minister's Fellowship Hour.

The kind of fellowship we need to strive for is where the conversation is uplifting, and where everyone leaves feeling strengthened, comforted, and encouraged loved, supported—and safe.

Choose your confidants carefully—some may mean no harm, but are careless about confidentiality. That's what Jesus meant when he warned us not to share what is precious to us with anyone who doesn't appreciate their value.

John said, *"If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."* (I John 1:7) This is the kind of fellowship we need to strive for -- fellowship that is illuminated by the light of Christ.

If you want to keep the fire burning, make sure that you feed the flame with the fat of fellowship. Spend time with those believers who support you in your Christian walk.

## **CONCLUSION**

Perhaps you're thinking "I need this. The fire in my life is barely flickering and barely alive—at least in some areas of my life." Others might say, "My fire is completely gone. It died a couple of years ago. I need a new fire."

Here's the good news: It only takes a spark to get a fire going. If you're ready to fill your life with the fire of God, God is willing to provide the spark.

He's prepared to light the fire again in your life—in your relationships with one another and in your relationship with him.

If you want to keep the fire burning, here's how you do it: You make it a daily priority to spend time in his presence, spend time helping others, spend time with his people. When you do this, your life will burn with a passion for God that can never be extinguished.

If we can help you in anyway please contact us by phone, email or at any of our worship services.