

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 21: 1-9

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue to read Leviticus 21:1-9.

Leviticus chapters 18 to 20 contain the statutes and ordinances for the Israelites to live a holy life. The Lord God is holy, and therefore His people must also be holy. For those who violate the statutes of holy living, God has established specific penalties. These three chapters consist of laws and decrees that the Israelites are required to diligently observe. By the time we reach chapter 21, the focus shifts to Aaron's family. Aaron is the high priest, and the male members of Aaron's family are priests. The priests are set apart to handle the sacrifices on behalf of the Israelites, serving in the tabernacle of God. The high priest also enters the Most Holy Place once a year to meet with God at the mercy seat. Therefore, God has special instructions for the priestly family, as their relationship with God is closer than that of the Israelites, and thus God's requirements for the priests are higher.

The statutes and ordinances in Leviticus chapters 18 to 20 are also mandatory for the priests, with additional regulations on top of those. Chapter 21, verses 1 to 9, outlines the specific rules that priests must follow. God's requirements for the high priest are even stricter than for the priests; verses 10 to 15 in chapter 21 contain the regulations that the high priest must observe. Here we see a principle: the closer one is to God, the higher the standard of holiness required.

God is a God full of love and grace, and those who are closer in relationship with Him naturally experience and enjoy more of His grace. Therefore, as it says in Luke 12:48, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." Here we see a principle that to whom much is given, much will be required. The priests, having received more grace, naturally have higher demands for holiness.

In the Old Testament, the male descendants born into Aaron's family were the priests, not because of their abilities or intelligence, but solely because of God's choosing in grace. The same is true in the New Testament. The condition for being a priest is not based on your abilities, knowledge, or experience, but on your birth. Every saved saint is reborn through the Holy Spirit, with God's life inside them, becoming His child. As it says in 1 Peter 2:5, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Here we see that we are all holy priests, and we are to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

Therefore, the requirements for priests in Leviticus 21:1-9 are actually also the requirements for every New Testament believer. We often have a mistaken understanding that in the church, those with evident gifts are the priests, and the majority of the saints are there to be served and fed. Because of this misunderstanding, in many churches, during Sunday worship, about 20% of the saints with visible gifts take care of all the service, while the other 80% expect to come empty and leave full. This is not the teaching of the Bible, and such a church cannot be built up.

The book of Ephesians is about the building up of the church. Ephesians 4:11-13 says, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." This passage clearly tells us that the purpose of the gifts God gave to the church is to equip the saints, so that every saint can fulfill their role. Through participation in service, every believer grows in the subjective experience of knowing the Son of God and matures. Every saint is to build up the church. More practically, the growth of each saint's life is the building up of the church.

Peter's understanding is completely the same as Paul's. Therefore, in 2 Peter 1:4-7, Peter encourages every believer that having God's life is not enough; we must also partake in God's nature. This means that each person must add to their faith

virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love for everyone.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have already been born again and have God's life. We must continue to move forward, as Peter instructed, and let God's nature grow in us; and according to God's nature, live a life that pleases Him. How do we know if our life pleases God? We should measure it according to the priestly regulations in Leviticus 21:1-9, which serve as the standard. This helps us understand the measure of spiritual growth in our lives and helps us recognize where we stand. Therefore, when we read the Scriptures, we first understand the facts of the Old Testament and then bring out the application of the New Testament.

Verses 1-3: "The Lord said to Moses: 'Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: None shall defile himself for the dead among his people, except for his relatives who are nearest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, his brother, and his unmarried sister who is near to him, who has no husband; for her he may defile himself.'"

At the beginning, it is clearly stated that this command is for the priests, the sons of Aaron. The priests must remain separated from death. We know that sin is defiling, and the wages of sin is death. This means that the accumulation of sin ultimately leads to death, making death more defiling than sin itself. Therefore, the priests are not to come into contact with the dead among the people, for doing so would defile them and prevent them from serving in the tabernacle.

The passage tells us that only in the case of the death of a direct relative can a priest defile himself by touching a dead body. The Bible clearly defines seven direct family relationships: a wife, father, mother, son, daughter, brother, and an unmarried sister, because once a sister is married, she belongs to her husband's family and is no longer part of these seven relationships.

The focus here is on direct blood relatives. For other relatives, such as extended family or in-laws, the priest cannot defile himself by contact with the dead. What we see here is that in the Old Testament, the priesthood required that natural emotions be regulated. Except for the death of direct relatives, no other relationships should influence a priest's service. The death of even a close family member should not affect their priestly duties, which is a very strict requirement. The Levites were chosen to serve God, as recorded in Exodus 32:25-28, where the sons of Levi stood with God, even to the point of taking up swords against their own brothers. Their natural emotions were dealt with. These rules applied to the priests in Aaron's family in the Old Testament.

How should this be applied in the New Testament? For New Testament believers, because we have received the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven, and through the rebirth of the Holy Spirit, we have eternal life from God. We have passed from death to life, and we are no longer defiled by physical death. Therefore, what we must avoid is spiritual death.

What is spiritual death? We have received God's eternal life, and this life will not disappear, will not die, and will remain forever. However, eternal life can stagnate or be hidden, causing it to lose its proper manifestation. Some believers succumb to the temptations of the world, they fall, return to the world, and even outwardly appear no different from unbelievers. They are experiencing spiritual death, as there is no manifestation of spiritual life in them.

As New Testament priests, we must stay away from spiritual death. Whenever we feel that our life is no longer fresh, when we lose interest in spiritual matters or lose our spiritual appetite, we need to be reminded that we are not far from spiritual death. We must immediately search for the underlying cause: perhaps we have been offended and cannot forgive, or there are desires we cannot let go of, or we have been contaminated by other saints experiencing spiritual death, or perhaps we have become discouraged after long periods of trial. In any of these situations, Paul encourages his co-worker Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6-7: "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my

hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

When we find ourselves in a state of spiritual stagnation, we must stir up the gifts within us. By accepting the Holy Spirit's renewal in our spirits and through our renewed service, we can help ourselves revive and stay away from spiritual death.

Verses 4-6: "Since the priest is the leader among the people, he shall not defile himself by following the customs of the nations. He shall not make his head bald, nor shave the edges of his beard, nor make any cuttings in his flesh. They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God; for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, the food of their God, and therefore they shall be holy."

The priests were the leaders among the Israelites, and as such, they were to set an example for the people. They were not to adopt the customs of the surrounding nations, especially those associated with idol worship. When the Gentiles offered sacrifices to their gods, some would shave their heads, others would cut the edges of their beards, and some would even make cuts in their bodies to show their devotion. These were the pagan practices. The priests, however, were to be holy to the Lord, and were not to imitate such practices, as doing so would profane the name of God. Since the priests offered the food of God—His offerings—they were to remain separate from worldly practices in order to keep the offerings pure and holy.

In the New Testament, we are all priests, offering spiritual sacrifices to God that are pleasing to Him. These spiritual sacrifices must be free from worldly mixtures. From the beginning to the end, God is pleased only with His Son, Jesus Christ. The spiritual sacrifices we offer to God are our understanding of Christ, our experience of Him, our praise of Him, and the manifestation of Christ in our lives. We must not follow the ways of the world in offering these sacrifices, for that would profane God and defile His food.

The passage specifically mentions three things: "He shall not make his head bald"—This speaks to each servant of God submitting to Jesus Christ as the head, recognizing Christ as our authority; "He shall not shave the edges of his beard"—This means we must fully accept God's arrangements in our service; "He shall not make any cuttings in his flesh"—This indicates that in our service, we must not use human efforts to exalt ourselves.

Dear brothers and sisters, the only offering we can give to God is Christ. The expansion of the Gospel and the building of the church must begin with the Gospel of Christ, and throughout the process, must align with Christ's righteousness and holiness. Ultimately, the goal is to bring glory to Christ. From beginning to end, it must be all about Christ, without any mixture of the world, so that we remain separate, holy, and devoted to God.

Verses 7-9: "They shall not take a wife who is a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for the priest is holy to his God. Therefore, you shall consecrate him, for he offers the food of your God; he shall be holy to you, for I, the Lord, who sanctify you, am holy. The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father; she shall be burned with fire."

Here we see that the priests' marriages must be holy. They were not allowed to marry a prostitute or a woman who had been defiled. A defiled woman refers to someone who has been involved in sexual immorality or divorced, as she has already been united to another man. Marriage is the joining of two people as one flesh, and if the wife is defiled, the husband is also defiled, making him unfit to serve God. Therefore, the priest's marriage must be pure.

The priest's role was to offer a pleasing fire offering to God as His food, and since God is holy, the entire process had to be holy. Therefore, God required the priest to maintain purity even in marriage. This holiness also extended to the priest's daughter—if she engaged in sexual immorality, she defiled both herself and her

father, and such a person would be severely punished, even to the point of being burned with fire.

In the New Testament, we are all priests, and God calls us to maintain spiritual purity and not be mixed with worldly influences. Regarding marriage, the New Testament does not impose as strict requirements as the Old Testament. For example, 1 Timothy 3:2 tells us that an elder must be the husband of one wife, and in 3:4, he must be able to manage his household and children well. The New Testament emphasizes the present state of a person, particularly the spiritual condition of a leader in the church, rather than their past.

Before salvation, we were all like the world, indulging in sinful desires. But when we are saved, we are made alive together with Christ and start anew. God cares more about how we live according to this new life, striving to live a holy life, free from the defilements of sin.

The regulations concerning the holiness of the priest can be applied to New Testament believers in three ways: Firstly, we must abstain from spiritual death; Secondly, we must fully separate ourselves from worldly practices; Thirdly, we must strive to pursue spiritual purity.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for saving us, forgiving our sins, and giving us new life. You have given us the identity of priests. Help us to avoid spiritual death in our daily lives, to separate ourselves from worldly influences, and to pursue spiritual purity. May we offer spiritual sacrifices as New Testament priests, dedicated to You. Bless our daily lives. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.