

EXODUS—WEEK 22

TURNING SINNERS INTO PRIESTS



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Moses' Descent from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments
by Ferdinand Bol (1616–1680) on display at the Royal Palace, Amsterdam*

The priests' garments and their rather bloody consecration ceremony serve to set the priests apart for their holy duties.

They're sinful people, just like everyone else, and something must be done to deal with that.

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Thank you.

Exodus 28:31–29:18 — Turning Sinners into Priests
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1 Exodus 28:31–35 (ESV)

“You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a garment, so that it may not tear. On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, around its hem, with bells of gold between them, a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, around the hem of the robe. And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the LORD, and when he comes out, so that he does not die.”

Time out. *So that he does not die?* Why would he die? What is it about the bells that keeps him alive?

First, we know that it’s the sound—*“and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the LORD, and when he comes out, so that he does not die.”*

Second, we know that the sound must be heard both *when he goes into the Holy Place* and *when he comes out*. So, this doesn’t have anything to do with sneaking up on God (which would be impossible anyway). If that was the case, the sound would only be important *when he goes into the Holy Place*. Notice also that it says *the Holy Place*, not the Most Holy Place. So, basically the question is, “Why is it so important to God that golden bells tinkle when the priest enters or exits *the Holy Place*?”

They do add a dimension of sound to the priest’s visit, but nothing says that’s important. The only other references to bells in scripture are Exodus 39 (which just repeats this description) and Zechariah 14:20 (which is unrelated). So, we aren’t told why God wants these bells. It’s His choice.

The bells do make sense in that they would make an unauthorized intruder stick out like a sore thumb. Everyone would be used to hearing the golden bells, and someone approaching *the Holy Place* silently would be obviously out of place. That makes it more difficult for someone to enter by accident or, God forbid, try to sneak in.

This provides yet another a layer of security.

As we’ll soon see, God can really light someone up (literally!) for disobeying His simple, easy to follow rules. Putting on the priestly garments isn’t half as much work as getting made up to go on television. None of the worship rules are challenging.

The Ten Commandments aren’t all that challenging either. Yet we can’t seem to obey them. That’s why we don’t need a teacher; we need a savior. Just as all these details about the Tabernacle highlight the seriousness of our sin, the simplicity of the rules we can’t seem to follow highlights sin’s stupidity.

God’s rules are never real challenges. Think of any honest challenge that you might face—run a five-minute mile, or shoot par for nine holes of golf. God’s rules are nothing like that. Yet we fail all the time. What a total mess we are. Our rescue from all that is a work of art.

“Praise God for the active obedience of Christ” — J. Gresham Machen

2 Exodus 28:36–38 (ESV)

“You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, ‘Holy to the LORD.’ And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue. It shall be on the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.”

This plate is attached to the turban with blue cords.

They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, “Holy to the LORD.” And they tied to it a cord of blue to fasten it on the turban above, as the LORD had commanded Moses. — Exodus 39:30–31 (ESV)

This forms a diadem (the type of crown mentioned in “Crown Him with Many Crowns”).

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diadem>

And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses. — Leviticus 8:9 (ESV)

The crown symbolizes power and authority. It declares that it's all the LORD's. It also keeps anyone from thinking that Moses is supposed to be the king.

But the big deal here is what this crown does. *The holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts have guilt*, which must be “borne” by Aaron so that *they may be accepted before the LORD*.

Their gifts have guilt? That's depressing (if you think that people are capable of offering an acceptable gift). The truth is that the gifts are flawed—because of the people's sin. Without this special presentation, the gifts will not even *be accepted before the LORD*. Ouch.

They need a Messiah.

So does everyone. Too bad they don't know it.

The great tragedy of Christianity—we love people we cannot save.

We can pray; we can preach, but it's ultimately God's job and God's choice, and we cannot control that.

But there's something especially glorious about our efforts on their behalf. The pain we suffer is a holy pain—a sacrifice we offer up on the altar of God's sovereignty. Never stop praying.

And keep your eyes open for God's response. He might grant your request (in His own time), but there are many ways that He may give a more complex answer.

Be ready to have your prayers redirected. The Holy Spirit does that a lot.

3 Exodus 28:39–43 (ESV)

“You shall weave the coat in checker work of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework.

“For Aaron's sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him.”

In addition to the ephod and breastpiece and robe and turban and crown, the priest must have regular clothes on, particularly pants. The New King James says “trousers” instead of “undergarments” here.

In such a hot climate, wearing something that close to your skin can be uncomfortable. Loose clothing with lots of air circulation underneath is coolest. Notice that this style of dress is assumed in the earlier prohibition against nakedness when approaching holiness.

And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it. — Exodus 20:26 (ESV)

Obviously, “*your nakedness*” is not referring to bare arms here. The body part that might be exposed when climbing stairs is the one that’s sometimes shown covered by a fig leaf.

Once again, God’s preference here is the sole justification for this rule. Lack of modesty is a capital offense when approaching the LORD. That seems harsh, but, again, God makes the rules.

Besides, this is about how to approach and serve Him, not everyday living. When you’re in the middle of trying to please someone, their preferences should be important.

When you buy someone a birthday present, whose desires do you consider—yours or theirs?

Worship is one of the most important functions of a church. We participate on the Sabbath, but how much do you pray about it otherwise?

Lift up your worship team. They go to great lengths to try to glorify God by leading worship the way He prescribes it. Ask the LORD to guide them and encourage them.

Pray specifically for your pastors and their sermon prep. Do you ever chat with them about what they’re preparing? You should. If you know their struggles, you’re better prepared to pray for them.

The same holds for the music team. Find out what their challenges are and send up informed prayers.

4 Exodus 29:1–9 (ESV)

“Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour. You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams. You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.”

The priests are still sinful people, regardless of what they’re wearing. So, a ceremony must be performed *to consecrate them* (the New King James says *to hallow them*). Obviously this can’t cleanse them of all sin, but it can make them holy (separate) and make them ceremonially clean enough to be acceptable.

The first thing they will do with *Aaron and his sons* is to *wash them with water*. This may seem obvious to modern Americans (so the clothes won’t get soiled), but bathing was rarer back then. Also, this particular procedure is only for the consecration ceremony, not for every time they enter the tabernacle.

Next comes the anointing with oil. Importantly, they don’t anoint everyone with oil, only Aaron. We tend to think of anointing as referring to the physical act of putting on the oil. That’s not what it means.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; — Isaiah 61:1a (ESV)

Aaron will be anointed as the chief priest—not “designated” as the chief priest, “anointed.”

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!* — Psalm 133:1–2 (ESV)

We make a big deal of ordaining people to church office. The ordination ceremony may look like just so much pomp and circumstance, but it’s much more than that. Church officers are looked up to. They represent God’s holy church. If they mess up, it can do a lot of damage.

Plenty of news stories have made this clear. Thus, we do everything in our power to preclude that. We train. We examine. We vote. We call. Then we ordain—with the laying on of hands, as God prescribed.

It’s His church, and we call on Him to protect it.

5 Exodus 29:10–18 (ESV)

“Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. Then you shall kill the bull before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall take part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar. But the flesh of the bull and its skin and its dung you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

“Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, and you shall kill the ram and shall take its blood and throw it against the sides of the altar. Then you shall cut the ram into pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, and burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD.”

The bull is a sin offering. That’s why *Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull*. They are laying their sins upon the bull. This is also why most of the bull is to be burned all the way outside the camp, not just outside the courtyard. That sets an important precedent.

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. — Hebrews 13:11–12 (ESV)

Next, the ram is also completely burned up, though the ram is all burned on the altar. But the legs and entrails must be washed first. Why?

All of the bull (except some fat and three organs) is to be burned outside the camp. But in describing this, the passage doesn’t say *entrails*; it says *dung*. This highlights what’s so unclean about the entrails.

The entrails of the ram and its legs (which walk though dung) are the dirty parts. That “dirt” might not even burn well, nor smell good while burning. Furthermore, the “dung” in the intestines is wet and hard to ignite.

So all that needs to be cleaned up. Remember, it’s supposed to be *a pleasing aroma*.

In addition to setting the precedent about taking the sin offering outside the camp, this passage displays the seriousness of the whole thing in a rather alarming fashion. After the laying on of hands, the animals are slaughtered and their blood splattered all over the altar.

So, even though they cleaned up anything that might make the fire stink, the place still looks like a crime scene. Again, the analogy with Christ’s sacrifice is strong.

We’re supposed to be repulsed by it.

