

## A Teacher's Clean Hands

I preached a message this past Sunday entitled "*The Decorum of Light.*" A major theme of that message addressed the purity of the people of the light. In the process of assembling a Sunday morning message, I run across many thoughts that the editing process requires that I leave on "the cutting room floor." But that in no way means that they are unworthy of sharing. For example, consider this thought from a sixth-century bishop of Rome (centuries before the formal establishment of the papacy):

"The pastor should always be pure in thought, inasmuch as no impurity ought to pollute him who has undertaken the office of wiping away the stains of pollution in the hearts of others ... for the hand that would cleanse from dirt must be clean, lest, being itself sordid with clinging mire, it soil whatever it touches all the more." - Gregory the Great

As a minister, the words are sobering and the responsibility they reflect, a bit terrifying. But, in Gregory's day, the masses were illiterate, the Holy Scriptures were chained to the monasteries, and the biblical footing of Christians was largely at the mercy of the integrity of a very few. Today is a bit different, particularly in our culture, where literacy is the norm and where ministers, parents, Bible school teachers, youth leaders, children's workers and even mutual friends all share the burden of imparting the truths of God's Word to others intelligibly and accurately.

While the New Testament believer has always been considered to be a priest of sorts, more modern believers, rightly or recklessly, are actually functioning as teachers in the lives of others. James reminds all of us in such roles: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

Part of the burden of teaching pertains to giftedness. Part of the burden pertains to the work and care that factors into "handling correctly" or "rightly dividing" the Word of truth. But Gregory's words should remind every teacher of the importance of having clean hands, especially, if one would find oneself "wiping away the stains of pollution in the hearts of others."

In the first generation of the Hebrew priesthood, two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were struck down by the LORD for offering "unauthorized fire" on the altar. We cannot be precisely sure of the details of the offense, but we can be quite sure that these two young priests were not careful and precise in their obedience to God. The importance of precise obedience to God was reiterated to the two young priests that replaced Nadab and Abihu:

"Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, 'Do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes, or you will die and the LORD will be angry with the whole community. But your relatives, all the house of Israel, may mourn for those the LORD has destroyed by fire.'" - Leviticus 10:6

The judgment may seem harsh, but the congregation of Israel needed to understand that when it came to the purity of those that minister to others in God's name, the LORD was not playing around. The power of purity is still important.

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

<sup>11</sup>Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. <sup>12</sup>Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. – 2 Peter 2:9-12

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