

8. Leprous sin

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Being sick is not fun. Nowadays, many of you have been sick with cold or flu or a chronic illness. Illness can even bring down a person's spirit as well.

Three chapters in Leviticus, chapter 13 through 15, we find God was concerned about His people's physical welfare. Those who do not understand the Bible might think why it is necessary for God to include all this nitty-gritty information regarding leprosy and other skin diseases as well as discharge of bodily fluids.

There is more to these chapters than simply a description of symptoms and ceremonies. In this case, leprosy is a type of sin.

I thought about the reason why people don't care to study the Book of Leviticus. The surface reason would be all the sacrifices and ritual processes seem irrelevant to our lives. But the true reason is what the Book says goes against the grain of our sinful nature. There is no other Book in the Bible that deals with our sins and the consequences of our sins in such a graphic way like this Book.

A. EXAMINED BY THE PRIESTS

Leviticus 13:1-3 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 "When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his body like a leprous sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. 3 The priest shall examine the sore on the skin of the body; and if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous sore. Then the priest shall examine him, and pronounce him unclean.

Leprosy is known as Hansen's disease nowadays. It is a disease that attacks the nerve systems and rots flesh away to the point of limbs fall off. A person with leprosy loses sense of feeling, especially pain that a person could put his hand on a hot object and not even realize that he is literally burning his own flesh.

During the ancient times as well as now in third world countries, they usually live in isolated leper colonies where rats are infested. At night rats raid the colonies and eat still alive lepers' flesh and the lepers don't realize what happen to them due to no nerve system in their limbs even their faces.

The worst part of this disease is utter isolation from everyone, especially from the family the leper once had.

Here we see the priests served as public health care officers and diagnosed the disease from this carefully defined criteria, not from intuition or guessing because a person's whole life is dependant on the priest's decision.

Illnesses such as smallpox, measles and scarlet fever might start out with a skin condition considered to be leprosy – and the person would be isolated for two weeks to give the disease a chance to change for better or for worse. This quarantine helped prevent the spread of these diseases among the people of Israel.

Can you imagine an Israel teenager who has a lot of zits on his face would be isolated all of his teenager life, huh?

As I said before, leprosy is often used as a type of sin in the Bible. Here are some connections I'd like to show you:

1) Sin sears and deadens a person's conscience as leprosy deadens a person's nervous system not to feel pain.

The sin that once a person thought he or she would never do becomes no big deal. Drugs, alcohol and pornography are the gateway to more serious sins.

2) Sin, like leprosy, disfigures a person in his heart and the person doesn't even realize that he is allowing this sin to destroy all the people he loves and things he worked so hard and the relationship with the very God who gave His life for him.

3) Sin, like leprosy, isolates a person from other believers.

It justifies its existence and needs in a person's life and pushes away those who care about him so that sin could bring this person down further.

4) Sin, like leprosy, is contagious.

I am sure that you heard, "misery loves company." Those who sin, want others to join their sins so that they are not the only ones who get isolated.

5) Sin, like leprosy, brings a horrible death.

Many call leprosy a living death. The wages of sin is death.

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

6) Sin, like leprosy, has no cure by human effort.

Doctors can treat leprosy's symptoms and minimize its effects on a person, but they cannot cure it. No psychological counseling, no training, no education and no social programs can cure sin. It might treat symptoms. Sin is more than skin deep like leprosy. Only the salvation and forgiveness by Jesus Christ can wipe away sins from a person's life as only the miracle healing power of God can cure leprosy.

7) Sin, like what leprosy does to a person physically, does to a person spiritually.

B. UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN

Leviticus 13:45-46 Now the leper on whom the sore is, his clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' 46 He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

Jewish custom said that you should not even greet a leper, and you had to stay six feet away from a leper. One Rabbi bragged that he would not even buy an egg on a street where he saw a leper, and another boasted that he threw rocks at lepers to keep them far from him.

But Jesus was different. He loved lepers. He touched them and healed them when they had no hope at all. No one could say Jesus broke the OT law, because the moment Jesus touched them they were normal.

For a moment, imagine yourself as a leper in the wilderness during that ancient time. You no longer can be with your family and friends because you've been pronounced as a leper. You have to let others know that you are a leper by crying out "Unclean, unclean". You have to live outside the camp isolated. Seems so far away from people, so far away from God. No future, no cure and no hope.

C. HEALED ONLY BY GOD

Leviticus 14:1-14 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. 3 And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, 4 then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. 5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. 6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. 7 And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field. 8 He who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean. After that he shall come into the camp, and shall stay outside his tent seven days. 9 But on the seventh day he shall shave all the hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows--all his hair he shall shave off. He shall wash his clothes and wash his body in water, and he shall be clean. 10 "And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. 11 Then the priest who makes him clean shall present the man who is to be made clean, and those things, before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 12 And the priest shall take one male lamb and offer it as a trespass offering, and the log of oil, and wave them as a wave offering before the Lord. 13 Then he shall kill the lamb in the place where he kills the sin offering and the burnt offering, in a holy place; for as the sin offering is the priest's, so is the trespass offering. It is most holy. 14 The priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.

As I've said before there is no known cure for leprosy to this day. Then we have a question regarding chapter 14. Why do we have a ritual for cleansing healed leper? This ritual was never used until Jesus healed lepers during His earthly ministry – like healing ten lepers all at one time. He told them to go and show themselves to the priest. I am sure that the priests had to refer to this book to do the ritual correctly.

The steps in the leper's cleansing and restoration is such a beautiful picture to us as what Jesus Christ has done for sinners:

1) Since the unclean leper wasn't permitted to enter the camp, the priest had to go outside the camp to minister to him or her.

Since we couldn't come to God, Jesus came to us. The Greatest Physician, our God, makes house calls to each sinner right where they are.

Luke 19:10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

2) Birds don't belong to earthen vessels, they belong to heavens.

Jesus came down from heaven and became a man.

3) Cedar wood is extremely resistant to disease and rot and it represents sinless Jesus as a man as well as a symbolic reference to the wood of the cross.

4) Scarlet is the sign of faith in the blood of Jesus.

Scarlet should be translated as a scarlet thread or yarn. It also reminds us that Rahab was instructed to put out a scarlet cord as an evidence of her faith.

5) Hyssop represents the faith of the individual.

It is the appropriation and the application of the redemption in Christ. The Israelites used hyssop to apply the blood of the lamb over their door post right before the first Passover so the death angel would not kill them.

6) One of the birds that was killed in an earthen vessel, of course, represents the physical body of Jesus Christ on the cross.

7) Over running water represents the Holy Spirit.

Note that it is not the water that sits, rather running water – fresh and living water.

8) The living bird that was dipped in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water and is released in an open field represents the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus was killed for our sins and stayed in the tomb, we have nothing other than a dead Messiah wanna-be. But our Savior's tomb is empty and He is risen. That gives us hope for our own resurrection and new life in heaven.

9) The priest shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy.

Without shedding of the blood, there is no remission. Of course, the blood of Jesus is perfect to save souls of men.

10) The priest shall pronounce him clean.

How did the victim know he was clean? The priest told him so. How do believers today know that God has saved us? He tells us so in His Word. No matter how the leper felt or what he looked like, God said he was clean, and that settled it.

11) On the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish...

Eight is the number of the new beginning.

12) The priest shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.

This is a very unique thing about this ceremony. The Lord wanted the priest to treat the healed leper like a fellow priest – putting oil and blood on the tip of the right ear, the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot and pouring oil on the former leper's head. What grace that God should treat a former leper like a priest.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Just because we are living in the age of Grace, that doesn't mean that we can ignore the laws of God.

I am so glad that we are living in the grace of God rather than under the law of God. However, the laws of God show the sinfulness of humans that we desire the grace of God all the more.

2) It is easy to ignore small sin at the beginning which will not stay a small sin. We must deal with our sins – big or small – with the same hatred like our God's against sin.

3) The earliest time is the best time to stop sin and confess it to our God Jesus.

"I will repent later," is the biggest excuse the devil pull on human.