

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Personal Purity Leviticus 14:33-15:33

Intro: Because of time, we were unable to read the rest of ch14. It's a long section but we will cover it quickly.

14:33-57- This last section of **ch14** deals with houses infected with some sort of growth. Since the Israelites were residing in tents, these laws were meant to apply later, after they had entered the land of Canaan. But clearly, in Israel, houses, much like people and clothing, could be declared unclean and unfit for habitation. If a homeowner noticed a discoloration growing on a wall, they were to call a priest to inspect the house for some ritual impurity. If any impurity was found on any wall, the house was to be emptied, so that nothing else in the house would be declared unclean, then the priest would order the home closed up. If, after 7 days, the contamination had spread, it was to be torn out so that the impurity was removed from Israel's midst. These impure building materials were then transferred to a designated place – a garbage dump of impurity – to ensure they weren't used again by anyone else. The plaster was scraped off the house's inside walls and another waiting period is implied. If the contamination has spread, the house is torn down completely. If it hasn't spread, the priest would pronounce the house clean, perform similar cleansing rituals as we saw in the previous section and the house could be repaired and safely used again.

We hurried through the end of **ch14** to have time to deal with **ch15**; not that I'm in a hurry to delve into the material. In fact, I've kind of been dreading it. I'll venture to say that not one of us here in this sanctuary has ever heard a sermon preached out of this chapter. Most ministers fear it, or at least they'd rather not deal with it and the reason can be summed up in 2 words – bodily functions. We all have them; but we don't talk about them and we certainly don't want other people to talk about theirs with us.

I was a Supervisor over a large group of employees for many years and invariably, a female employee would come to my desk with a complaint about some pain or discomfort stemming from some "female problems." As soon as those words were spoken I would stop them and tell them that they could do whatever they needed to do or go wherever they needed to go, I

didn't require ANY details. I preferred not to have them. Imagine my discomfort when 1 employee insisted on relaying to me the gory details of her recent hysterectomy and all the internal problems she was having because of it.

I had a very conservative upbringing. When I was in grade school, we weren't allowed to use the word "pregnant" we could only say someone was "expecting." I remember in 4th grade, all the boys were taken out of our classroom so that the teachers could speak to just the girls about what they could expect as they got closer to their adolescent years. Of course, we had no clue what they were discussing and didn't care to know. We were just glad we were able to get out of class for a while. Now, in the media age in which we live, almost every taboo has been broken. In movies, on TV and the internet, there's no longer any hesitation to talk about such things in detail.

However, this sanctuary is not the internet or a movie theater. As Christians, we regard our spiritual life – including our public worship, as holy and we should! This is a place where we meet with God's people, study God's Word and are transformed by God's Holy Spirit. But, if God didn't intend for us to ever read or discuss the subject matter of ch 15, He wouldn't have included it in His Word. Ps 19 says "The law of the Lord is perfect" and "the statutes of the Lord are right" (7a, 8a). So, nothing in any section of scripture is indecent, even though God often addresses the indecency of human sin in Scripture. What God has to say in His Word about bodily functions is candid but not vulgar. Thus, if the Bible offends us, it's not the Bible that's in error; our fleshly sensitivities are.

Our text concerns male and female genital discharges; normal and abnormal. The topics are laid out in a specific order but there are some necessary departures from the cleanliness issues of the previous chapters. Unlike those earlier issues, there is no priestly inspection or diagnosis. Very private, intimate parts of the male and female bodies are concerned here. On one hand, this shows the YHWH's lordship over every area of Israelite life. On the other hand, unlike the previous issues, the Israelites were on the honor system as far as reporting goes. The individual was required to attend to their own diagnosis and treatment.

Also, these are still life and death issues, not in and of themselves but they

relate to the danger involved if Israelites were to present themselves at the tabernacle in a ritually unclean state. The major reason for these instructions is so that the Israelites would know what makes them unclean in this area so that when they present themselves before the Lord, they will not die. More importantly, these instructions were not simply about the preserving of the individual Israelite but about the preservation of the entire community.

1-15 – Much like ch12, ch15 nowhere explains why certain bodily fluids were ritually defiling; it merely assumes it as fact and discusses how to address it. The first issue it deals with is abnormal male discharges; more specifically, abnormal genital discharges. When the text mentions “his body,” it’s referring to the male reproductive organ. The abnormal discharge is either an uncontrolled urination (enuresis) or an inability to urinate (urethritis). WWII Marines that spent months in the jungles of the South Pacific were known to experience enuresis, mainly because they were often soaking wet for weeks at a time. The stoppage was caused by a swelling of the urethra due to some infection or even a STI. Either case would render the man ritually unclean and prevent them from going to the tabernacle. The initial impurity is mentioned only briefly. More ink is given to the status of those who come in contact with this unclean person. They would also be unclean, but their ritual uncleanness was easily addressed and only lasted a short time (‘til evening). After that, they could safely enter the tabernacle precincts again. The man himself, once he is healed of the discharge, must wait a week (7 days) after which he may be ceremonially cleansed after washing his clothes and bathing. To complete the ceremonial cleansing, he’s to take 2 doves or pigeons to the tabernacle, 1 for a purification offering (to cleanse the man’s impurity from the tabernacle and the man himself), 1 for a burnt offering (to make general atonement for the man and express his thanks and praise for his healing). The priest sacrifices these, resulting in atonement for the man and ritual purity.

16-18 – This section deals with impurity that comes from normal male discharges. This passage is very brief but has caused a lot of confusion. 3 laws are given to describe how to ritually cleanse oneself from an emission of semen. Since v18 addresses what to do for an emission that occurs during sex, v16 must apply to a different situation, as in a nocturnal emission. In such cases, the man underwent standard cleansing rites (bathing and waiting until evening) which indicates this as a minor impurity.

Similar cleansing rites applied to any clothing or items of leather that got semen on them (17). When an emission of semen happened during sex, the cleansing rites were the same.

What inquiring minds really want to know is: why? Why does a normal male discharge, intentional or otherwise, lead to ritual impurity? It should first be noted that ritual impurity only resulted from sex because an emission of semen – like various other bodily fluids – was considered a source of impurity. In fact, the Israelites weren't the only ancient culture to hold this view, although the rationale wasn't always the same, nor was it always known, not even by members of the culture itself. The Bible doesn't tell us if there was a specific rationale for this view but we do know that many of the pagan cultures that surrounded Israel engaged in ritual or sacred prostitution as a normal part of their temple worship practices. Thus, classifying seminal emissions as impure would have prevented illicit sexual rites from taking place at the tabernacle.

We should also note that just because impurity resulted from seminal emission didn't mean God or Israel viewed sex as a negative or sinful thing. Israelites thought of sex very positively. They were actually exhorted by God to be captivated by their spouse's physical love (Prv 5:15-19). There's little ambiguity in that passage. Now, if it seems counter-intuitive that a positive view could be held of a ritually defiling event, just remember our study of childbirth in ch12. It also resulted in ritual impurity due to loss of bodily fluids, but it was still considered a supreme blessing!

In truth, the Israelites looked very favorably on certain activities that made them ritually impure, just as most of us today look positively on certain activities that make us physically impure (working outside, sports). Such impurity needs to be addressed before one enters decent society (like bathing and changing clothes before going to church), but this doesn't cast a negative light on the activity that caused the impurity.

19-24 – This section addresses the impurity that comes from normal female discharges: menstruation. The cleansing rites are a bit more elaborate here than in 16-18; not because men are being treated more favorably but because, as we saw in ch12, human blood loss was one of the most ritually defiling substances in ancient Israel. A woman having her period was ritually impure for 7 days; the count began at the start of her period. After 7 days

she would then be pure, no doubt after bathing and washing her clothes (13, 21-22). What's significant is that, although the impurity was very severe, no sacrifice was required for it, mercifully sparing women and their families a heavy financial burden.

While the condition was obviously not contagious, the impurity from the condition was very much so. Those who touched anything the woman lay or sat on during her period would be impure and would be required to perform the standard purification procedures: bathing, washing their clothes, and would remain impure until evening. This implies that those who touched the woman would need to do the same.

Having said that, nowhere do these regulations prohibit contact with menstruating women? It was usually not wrong to become impure, as long as the impurity was dealt with properly. Family and friends were in no way prevented from extending physical and emotional comfort to these women. Plus, these laws provided women a socially acceptable way of withdrawing from others to rest and recuperate, something they may have been grateful for in a world with no medication or hygiene products related to menstruation.

If there was any question of unfair treatment of women in these regulations, v24 should dispel that notion completely. If a man were to have sexual relations with a menstruating woman, an act which is expressly forbidden in 18:19 and 20:18, but could still happen completely by accident, the man appears to have the same degree of impurity as the woman, being unclean for 7 days and communicating the impurity to any bed he lay on during that time. This implies that he would also need to go through the same purification procedures as the woman. We will also see in the next section that for abnormal discharges, the purification procedures are the exact same for both men and women.

25-30 – this addresses the impurity that comes from abnormal female discharges; meaning ones not resulting from menstruation. Such discharges are generally termed dysfunctional uterine bleeding and can result from something as mundane as ovulation and intercourse or from something much more serious, like cervical or uterine cancer. Although menstruation was not the cause of the discharge of blood, blood was lost just the same and the resulting impurity had the same effect on those who came in contact

with her as that of menstruation. But, once the discharge was healed, she would count off 7 days and on the 8th day, she would perform the same purification procedure as did the man with an abnormal discharge; bathing and washing clothes can be assumed as well.

31-33 – It appears that major impurities in some way automatically defiled the sanctuary; although such automatic defilement would count as an unintentional sin and could thus be atoned for by a sacrifice. People don't intend to defile the sanctuary by having these impurities. But again, if impure people didn't address their impurity properly, this defilement would remain on the Lord's dwelling place. Plus, these people risked having their ritual impurity spread through the camp and having it brought back to the tabernacle. So, failing to deal properly with impurity wasn't just a failure to acknowledge the Lord's holy kingship, it was a direct repudiation of it – as slap in the face, as it were. It was no less than a declaration that the holiness of the Lord was of no consequence to them. This, of course, was nothing less than an act of treason and as such, it was met with the penalty often exacted on the treasonous: death.

Thus, the Lord exhorts Moses and Aaron to separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness; that is, to help them to address their ritual impurity properly so they might avoid the punishment that results from disrespecting their holy King. Naturally, we can apply all the impurities mentioned from ch11-15 to this command.

So, how does this very intimate (and obsolete) passage relate to the church today? Well, in 2 very important ways. First, while the laws of physical and ritual purity have been rendered obsolete by NT doctrine, the concept of moral and ethical purity has not; the Lord is still the Divine Intruder in the life of the Christian. There is no room in the Christian life for the attitude expressed by the person who responded to a question by saying, "Yes, I'm a Christian, but I try not to let it interfere with the way I live." Instead, the Bible teaches us that the Lord's claim on the life of a Christian is both pervasive and absolute. If you were unaware of that when you accepted Christ, well; surprise!

Still, it's not completely correct to say that spiritual purity has nothing to do with physical purity. It's clear to the honest reader that the regulations in ch15, at the very least, allude to the concept of sexual restraint and we'll

see more of this in ch18 and 20. But even for our text, it's clear that the Divine Intruder is concerned about physical, sexual purity. This concept isn't limited to the OT. The Apostle Paul often associates uncleanness with fornication. I Cor 6:12-20 reminds us that sexual immorality is not just a sin against human bodies, but is also a sin against the Body of Christ. The regulations given in ch11-15 are for the purpose of preserving royal protocol and the concerns with discharges in our text are meant to offset the possible defilement of the Lord's holy palace. Today, the Lord's holy palace, His temple, is the church; and by maintaining sexual purity we preserve the royal protocol and avoid defiling His church.

Second, we should understand that Jesus Christ is the one who not only heals us of our impurities, but He does so by taking our impurities upon Himself. We've already seen in ch4-5 and ch10, with reference to the purification offering, that the sacrificial animal, the priest and even the tabernacle itself bore the ritual impurities of the Israelites. The story in Mk 5 of the woman with the bleeding disorder (for 12 yrs!) agrees with this understanding. Her reaching out and touching Jesus would have rendered Him unclean, at least that's what our text is saying. But instead, what happened when she touched Jesus was the purity of Jesus was conveyed to her and she was healed completely.

But, what happened to her impurity, what happened to her infirmity? Did it simply dissipate up into the ether? No, neither sin nor its consequences simply disappear; they must be addressed and properly dealt with. In the case of this woman, as in every case of healing or salvation, the purity of Jesus was conveyed to the woman and Jesus took on her impurity in exchange for His purity. At Calvary, Jesus, the pure One, was made impure; there, God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (II Cor 5:21); there, His wounds brought about our healing. His life-giving and life-restoring ministry is possible because He became the sacrifice that took on all our impurities, thereby removing them and making us clean.

Jesus Christ, as the full and final sacrifice, as the priest who is greater than Aaron, and the One who offered the temple of His body to be torn down – but then raised up again in 3 days – has forever removed our sins and impurities from us by taking them upon Himself and bearing them in His own body. Because He was raised from the dead, we are healed and given eternal life in Him. Thus, we no longer need to fear those dreadful words of

v31, lest they die... Jesus took both our impurities and our infirmities on the cross. Should we not also endeavor to live lives that cast honor upon such a great sacrifice? 😊