

February 1, 2015 by Steve Brandon



Sensitive Subjects

Leviticus 12 & 15

Uncleanness ...

1. For Childbirth (chapter 12)
2. For Men (15:1-18)
3. For Women (15:19-33)

In our continuous exposition of the book of Leviticus, we come this morning to chapters 12 and 15. These chapters contain delicate matters. These are the sorts of chapters that you would be tempted to skip. In fact, I had a discussion with Yvonne yesterday, considering that very topic. Can we just skip these chapters?

It's difficult to talk about these things. One pastor that I listened to in preparation for my message said that these chapters contain things "that ought not to be mentioned in public." But, these things are in God's word. And thus, I believe, worthy of our attention. But, we do need to deal with them delicately.

We should not be crude or offensive or overly explicit. Believe me, that's not my aim this morning. No pictures this morning! I want to be careful in how we speak about these matters. Straight-forward, but sensitive. And so, by the grace of God, I will address these issues with discretion.

We will be looking this morning at what happens when things come out of our bodies. Things that come out of our bodies are yucky. They are slimy and smelly and gross. Just think for a moment about the things that come about of your body: Spit. Sneeze. Sweat. Blood. Boogers. Puss. Urine. Feces. Gas. It's all nasty stuff.

Seven and eight year-old boys love to laugh at this sort of stuff. I know, because I have a seven-year old at home. He loves to laugh at the idea of boogers and poop and gas. Nothing is funnier to him than a whoopee cushion.

And yet, there is nothing funny about the matters that we are discussing this morning. We are talking about those things that make you unclean, that is, unfit for worship.

Again, I remind you that the first five chapters of Leviticus (1-5) deal with the sacrifices that the Israelites were to offer. The second five chapters of Leviticus (6-10) deal with the priests and how they are to perform the sacrifices. The section that we are in, chapters 11-15, deal with matters of cleanness and uncleanness. And in many ways, the book of Leviticus climaxes in chapter 16, which describes the Day of Atonement. That one single day of the year when the high priest enters the holy of holies to atone for all of the sins of Israel!

But leading up to that day, we have chapters 11-15, which describe things that make you unclean. These are the sorts of things that made an Israelite unacceptable for worship: eating the wrong things, touching a dead animal, having a skin disease, having things come out of your body. And when you are unclean, you are unfit for worship.

Psalm 24:3-4

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

And in some measure, these things of being clean and unclean are like sin. The fundamental consequence of sin is that it makes you unable to enter the LORD's presence. This is the consequence of being unclean. You cannot "ascend the hill of the LORD." You cannot enter into the holy place if you are unclean.

Leviticus 15:31

Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.

And one of the things that I hope you see this morning from chapters 12 and 15 is how deep your uncleanness is. Theologians will often say that we are sinners by nature and sinners by choice. There is much emphasis given in the Bible upon how we are sinners by choice. But, there is little emphasis given in the Bible upon how we are sinners by nature (see Psalm 51:4). And yet, this is what we will see this morning. We will see how simply being human and experiencing many of the things that humans face, makes you unclean before the LORD.

See, entering into God's presence isn't always about what we do or don't do (as important as that is). Entering into God's presence is also about who we are. And we are human beings. And God is God. We are different than He is. And there are times that we, through no fault of our own, not because of something we did, we are unclean. In our small group last Sunday we went over this passage to talk about these things. And I remember how we all were stunned with our impurity.

Perhaps the LORD will stun you with this truth this morning as well. That your nature is distinct from God's. You cannot approach God on your own. Your humanness will often disqualify you. We see the uncleanness of being human.

And if you see the depths of these things, my prayer is that you will see the glories of Jesus. Jesus has purified us, not merely from the things that we have done wrong, but from who we are. We are unclean! But, God has cleansed us at the cross.

This morning, we will see things that would have disqualified a man or a woman from worship. And yet, today, they haven't disqualified us. Because, we are clean in Christ.

For instance, in chapter 12, we see the uncleanness...

1. For Childbirth (chapter 12)

Let's read the chapter.

Leviticus 12

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

"Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days. As at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Then she shall continue for thirty-three days in the blood of her purifying. She shall not touch anything holy, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying are completed.

But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation. And she shall continue in the blood of her purifying for sixty-six days.

"And when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, and he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean."

Again, having children is not sinful. God commanded it before the fall, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). This same command was repeated to Noah after the fall, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Walking in obedience to God cannot be a sin! The act that leads to conception is not sinful, as long as it's within the bounds of holy matrimony. Carrying the child for 9 months is not sinful. But giving birth makes you unclean. And for the Jewish woman, this meant that they couldn't enter into worship until they were cleansed.

There are two things needed for cleansing: time and sacrifice. For a boy, the time for impurity is 40 days. Seven days, then circumcision. Then 33 days. For a girl, the time for impurity is 80 days. Fourteen days, then another 66 days. And when the days are completed, some offerings need to be made for cleansing. A burnt offering. And a sin offering.

Now, there are some questions that come at this point. Why the difference between a boy and a girl? I don't know. Like many things, there are guesses. But, nobody knows for sure.

Another question: Why a sin offering? (verse 6, 8). If having a child isn't sinful, then why offer a burnt offering and why a sin offering? The simple explanation to this is that the process brings forth blood, and lots of it! I mentioned last week how the birthing process is bloody and messy. And with blood around, atonement needs to be made. Because, as Leviticus 17:11 says, "the life of the flesh is in the blood."

And so, for every woman in Israel, this was their lot. After birth, they were unclean for 40 or 80 days. This is not true for us now. Some of you women have been in church the Sunday after giving birth. But this was how it was for those in Israel.

Now, it wasn't an unbearable lot. Do you remember when Jesus was born? Mary and Joseph followed these instructions exactly. We read in Luke 2, ...

Luke 2:21-22

And at the end of eight days, ... he was circumcised. And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

And it was important that Mary and Joseph did this. Because, Jesus was born under the law. As Galatians 4:4 says, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." In other words, Jesus was subject to the law of God. He was required to do everything the law required of Him to do.

And as Mary and Joseph followed the law in Leviticus 12, they kept Jesus in total subjection to the law. And it was important for us that He keep the law in everything, because our redemption depended upon it. If Jesus had failed in any part, then His sacrifice upon the cross would

have meant nothing for us.

But, He did keep the law in every way. And He died as a sinless substitute for us. He kept the law that we never could keep! We read of this in Romans 8: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (verses 3-4).

Well, let's move on to chapter 15. In this chapter, we see similar themes. That's why we are taking these chapters together. We see impurities as a result of bodily functions.

We see uncleanness for

2. Men (15:1-18)

Let's begin with verse 1.

Leviticus 15:1-3

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, 'When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. And this is the law of his uncleanness for a discharge: whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is blocked up by his discharge, it is his uncleanness.

We see the main problem here described as a "discharge," something that comes out of the private parts of a man. Although the exact identification of this is difficult, most commentators would identify this as gonorrhea. That interpretation goes back as far as the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament that goes back to several hundred years before Christ came. And when one was unclean like this, everything was unclean! Listen to verse 4 and following, ...

Leviticus 15:4-15

Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean, and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. And anyone who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. And whoever sits on anything on which the one with the discharge has sat shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. And whoever touches the body of the one with the discharge shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. And if the one with the discharge spits on someone who is clean, then he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. And any saddle on which the one with the discharge rides shall be unclean. And whoever touches anything that was under him shall be unclean until the evening. And whoever carries such things shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. Anyone whom the one with the discharge touches without having rinsed his hands in water shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. And an earthenware vessel that the one with the discharge touches shall be broken, and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water.

"And when the one with a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count for himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes. And he shall bathe his body in fresh water and shall be clean. And on the eighth day he shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and come before the LORD to the entrance of the tent of meeting and give them to the priest. And the priest shall use them, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD for his discharge.

His bed is unclean (verse 4). His chairs are unclean (verse 4). Anyone who touches his bed is unclean (verse 5). Anyone who sits where he sits is unclean (verse 6). Anyone who touches him (verse 7). Even his dishes are unclean. Unlike Midas, who turned everything he touched to gold, this man made everything he touched unclean.

Now, just think about this man's life. He would have his own room. Nobody would go in. Nobody would go out. And certainly, such a man was not fit for worship!

I don't care how nice this man was. I don't care how much he cared for people. I don't care how much he knew of the Bible. He couldn't be among God's people, for he would pollute them all. He couldn't come into the presence of God! He was alone, an outcast.

But, there was hope. If the discharge stopped, he could count seven days. Then he could bathe himself, and offer a sin offering and a burnt offering (just like after a woman gave birth to a child), and he would be clean. He could come into the presence of the LORD!

This hope is true for all of these conditions. After the birth of a child, a woman had hope of cleansing. It simply took 40 or 80 days and a few sacrifices. With a sexual disease, when the oozing stopped, it took 7 days and a few sacrifices

In the case of marital relations, the uncleanness was only until evening. And it didn't even require sacrifice; simply a bath.

Leviticus 15:16-18

"If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening. And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water and be unclean until the evening. If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water and be unclean until the evening.

Oh, church family, you have a better hope! For those in Israel, they always had to wait. But, we don't need to wait. We are clean in Jesus, washed completely from our iniquities and from our uncleanness.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

And when were you washed? You were washed when you believed in Jesus. You were washed when God did a regenerating work in your soul. "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:5). This is what we have in Jesus. We have cleansing. We are pure vessels in God's hand.

I don't care what has been in your past. If you believe and trust in Jesus, you are clean. You don't need to depart from us today because you are unclean. Because Jesus has made you clean if you but believe.

Well, let's move on. We have seen Uncleanness For Childbirth (chapter 12) and Uncleanness For Men (15:1-18).

Now, Uncleanness ...

3. For Women (15:19-33)

Let's pick it up in verse 19. I'm going to read it from the NIV, as I think it's a bit more sensitive in its language.

Leviticus 15:19-30

"When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening.

"Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. Anyone who touches her bed will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening. Anyone who touches anything she sits on will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening. Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, they will be unclean till evening.

"If a man has sexual relations with her and her monthly flow touches him, he will be unclean for seven days; any bed he lies on will be unclean.

"When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. Anyone who touches them will be unclean; they must wash their clothes and bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

"When she is cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven days, and after that she will be ceremonially clean. On the eighth day she must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting. The priest is to sacrifice one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement for her before the Lord for the uncleanness of her discharge.

Just think of the realities of this. Women in Israel were unclean every month for a week at a time. They were confined to their room. They were prohibited from worship. No Sunday School attendance awards for them. Can you let it sink in? Can you imagine missing one out of every four Sunday mornings?

It's not because of sin. It's because of who we are. We are human beings with uncleanness in our flesh. But, with the healing touch of Jesus, all can be made well.

This past summer I met Pastor Jamie for the first time. He preached here two weeks ago in my absence. And whenever I meet a pastor, I like to ask him what he has been preaching on in recent days. First of all, it gives me an insight into his ministry. Second, it's what he has been thinking about. And so, I know that some gems and jewels are ready to flow from his mouth.

Anyway, I asked Jamie about what he was preaching on. The way these things work is that he turned to ask me what I was preaching in recent weeks. In the summer, we were spending some time in the Psalms. And then, I told him of my plan to preach through Leviticus beginning in the fall.

And he said, "Oh, I love Leviticus. Leviticus 15 is my favorite chapter in the Bible!" I immediately corrected him, saying, "You mean Leviticus 16." He said, "No. Leviticus 15." Again, I tried to correct him, saying, "Leviticus 16 speaks about the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 15 is yucky." He said, "No. Leviticus 15."

He then proceeded to tell me about the woman in Mark, chapter 5, who was unclean because of her flow of blood. But, touching Jesus, she became clean. He basically gave me the five-minute mini-sermon that he preached here two weeks ago. Indeed, they were gems and jewels.

We will take a little bit longer than five minutes. But, it will form a fitting conclusion to my message this morning. So, turn in your Bibles to Mark, chapter 5. We are going to read about this woman. Let's begin in verse 24, ...

Mark 5:24b

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.

If you scan your eye back a few verses, you can see the context here is that a man named Jairus has come to Jesus and asked Him to come and lay His hands upon her daughter, that she might be made well. And so, "he went with him" (verse 24). And along the way, Jesus was surrounded by a "great crowd." We read in verse 25, ...

Mark 5:25

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years,

Let's think about this woman for a few moments, especially in light of Leviticus 15. We read in verse 25 that she had "a discharge of blood for twelve years." Twelve years. Twelve years of isolation. Twelve years of uncleanness. Twelve years of "everything that she touched was unclean."

According to verse 26, we see that this was 12 years of suffering.

Mark 5:26

and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse.

It was also 12 years of going broke. She went to doctor after doctor after doctor. None could solve her problem. But all of them could take her money. Verse 27, ...

Mark 5:27

She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment.

Again, think about Leviticus 15. Because of her medical condition, she had been banished to her home. She was not permitted to go out, as everything she touched would become unclean. Everywhere she sat would become unclean. Certainly, her life was filled with hopelessness and shame. Perhaps this explains why she came up, "behind" Jesus (verse 27). Contrast this with Jairus, who came to Jesus face to face, falling down at his feet (verse 22).

But this woman came and touched Jesus! She touched His garments! This is like an AIDS patient spitting on her nurse. According to the law, this would make Him unclean. Her reasoning comes in verse 28, ...

Mark 5:28

For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well."

To me that sounds a bit superstitious. "If I touch Him, I will be made well." "If I touch even His garments, I will be made well." Surely, she had heard something about the miracle-working power of Jesus (verse 27). Jesus took Peter's mother-in-law by the hand, and the fever left her (Mark 1:30). Jesus touched the leper and he was made clean (Mark 1:41). We will look at that account next week. Thinking of these miracles, she had some basis for her "touch" theology.

But, she also had a lot of faith -- faith that Jesus would heal her, that Jesus wouldn't turn on her for touching him, that the crowds wouldn't turn on her for defiling the Rabbi.

Well, her plan worked. Verse 29, ...

Mark 5:29

And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

This shows the great power of Jesus, that this woman was healed! Jesus did what the physicians could not do. Jesus did it without even trying! Verse 30, ...

Mark 5:30

And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?"

Jesus felt the healing power go out from Him. But, Jesus didn't know who exactly it was who was healed. He wasn't trying to heal this woman. In fact, Jesus wanted to see who this woman was.

The disciples were mocking Jesus. Verse 31, ...

Mark 5:31

And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?'"

You've been in a big crowd. You know what it's like. People pushing from all around, trying to get wherever it is that they are trying to go. And Jesus said, "Who touched me" (verse 31). Well, probably about thirty people touched Jesus. But, Jesus was determined, ...

Mark 5:32-33

And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth.

Can you imagine the explanation that went forth from her lips?

"Jesus, I have been suffering.
I have been bleeding for 12 years.
I have gone to every doctor that I know.
But none can heal me.

I have been shut up in my house.
I have been cut off from public.
I can't go shopping.
I can't stop by to see my friends.
I can't even clean my home, because everything I touch becomes unclean, rather than clean.

I have been cut from worship.
It's been 12 years since I have attended the synagogue.
I desperately want to be with the people of God.
But, I can't.

Then, I heard that you were passing by.
I have heard of your healing power.
I have heard how you took the fever from Peter's mother-in-law.
I have heard how you cleansed the leper.
I have heard of how you healed the paralytic
And the man with the withered hand
And the demon-possessed man from across the sea.
I thought to myself, "He can heal me."
I just need to touch him.

Jesus, I know that I'm unclean.
I know that I'm not worthy to enter your presence.
I know that I'm not worthy to receive your touch.

That's why I just touched the fringe of your garment.
And God healed me.
I know he did!
I can feel the flow of blood stop!

Praise be to God!
Thank you Jesus."

Mark 5:34

And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

I feel that this little exchange was important for her. It was important for the crowd. It was important for them to know that Jesus had not been made unclean by her touch, but that she had been made clean.

And the obvious application to all of us this morning is this: are you trusting in the healing power of Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus has the authority and ability to cleanse you from your sin?

Leviticus 15:31

"Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst."

Notice how the impurity spreads. It's the impure man causing all around him to be impure, not the other way around. This is like water. When

you mix water and dirt, the water doesn't make the dirt clean. Rather, the dirt contaminates and dirties the water. And this is the way that sin works. When the righteous are around sinners, it is usually the sinners who prevail.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Bad company corrupts good morals." The principle here of uncleanness is true of morality. It is not wise for you to be a companion of fools. The Proverbs say that "the companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

But Jesus is different. Jesus heals. Jesus cleanses.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 1, 2015 by Steve Brandon.
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