

## ***IS IT A SIN TO BE SICK?, LEV.13***

Ancient Access Codes #3

◆**Intro:** What's the worst thing that ever happened to your skin? Got a major sunburn on Spring Break in your haste to be gorgeously tan overnight? You know, the kind that itches so bad you want to rub up against a the bark of a tree, but that just makes it itch even worse? How about getting poison-ivy?! Now that's no walk in the park, is it?! Back in the day all they gave you was calamine lotion to dab on the blisters. You'd have little spots of pink makeup everywhere. In the Ancient Israel, that would have been enough to bar you from Sunday services or praise team practice! You'd have to go to the priest for inspection. And as you can see from our text, already Israel had the practice of quarantining people to prevent the spread of disease -kind of a side benefit of the levitical laws that they likely didn't fully appreciate. The modern practice of quarantine, as we know it, didn't begin until during the 14th century in an effort to protect coastal cities from bubonic plague epidemics. Ships arriving in Venice from infected ports were required to sit at anchor for 40 days before landing. This practice, called quarantine, was derived from the Italian words quaranta giorni which mean 40 days. The Black Death eventually took the lives of 14 to 15 million people across Europe, or up to one-fifth of the population. Seems like cleanliness is a good idea!

◆And as before in Leviticus, we see how closely God has tied his holy presence to the life of his people. This time it's in dealing

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with illnesses, particularly skin diseases. In our text today we find a kind of theology of disease. Our first practical application is...

◆ **1. Live a clean life.** God cares about clean living!

◆ One thing we should understand is that disease, like death itself, is part of the fallen world. It is not part of God's presence. There is no disease in heaven. There is no death in the presence of God our Creator.

◆ *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.""* Revelation 21:3-5, NIV.

◆ In the full presence of God there is only holiness and life. This is part of the daily object lessons of skin rashes the Israelites learned. Leviticus obviously doesn't address every sort of possible physical ailment, for it is not a medical manual. No prescriptions for headaches, tumors, or nausea. The readily visible things it does address, while having medical insight, are actually reminding the people of theological truths.

◆ For example, the rule not to circumcise a child until the eighth day was a command from God (Lev.12:3). But

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nowhere does the Scripture tell us what we know today, namely that the human body doesn't produce vitamin K until it's eight days old, and vitamin K is necessary for blood to clot. If blood doesn't clot, a person will bleed to death. As far as we know, Israel didn't know this, but they had to trust that God knew what he was commanding.

◆Neither do we know for sure that the Hebrews knew that value of quarantining infectious people to keep disease from spreading. We do know that God told them disease made them "unclean" and therefore they could not be "in the camp" or near to God's presence.

◆What's clear in our text is that disease, sickness, death are not the "norm" in God's presence. They are ab-normal, outside God's design. God's holiness means health, life, thriving, purity. These all go together in the normal world. Likewise sin and death are partners in the abnormal world. That is to say then that had not mankind brought sin into the world, we would not be selling acetaminophen or prozac today. Eli Lilly would not have been a millionaire. There would be no such thing as crutches or bandaids or severe cold medicine. Teens would not get acne. Maybe every boy could grow muscle from donuts and every girl would be stunning *before* she used makeup! Where God's full presence is, man must be holy, and therefore will also be healthy, vital, and fully alive. All that destroys life is of a lower realm, a fallen place. This is a lesson built into Israel's cultic rituals.

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◆**B.** What does this say to us? Live a clean life! God wants you to be holy because he wants you to be healthy! So wash your bodies. And wash your hands. And cover your mouth when you cough, and take your vitamins, etc. Exercise, and take care of your body because while you are a spiritual being, you are a embodied spirit. Teach your children to blow their noses. Wipe the dirt off their faces even though you know they will get dirty again. The Bible even calls your body the temple of the Holy Spirit! Your body isn't of the lower realm. Only sickness and disease are of a fallen world.

◆*"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, NIV.*

◆Furthermore, in living a clean life make it a practice to wash your mind and wash your heart too. Confess your sins to God lest they stack up and weigh your spirit down into depression. Turn your face away from things you know will suck you in if you only let them. If the magazines you bring home, or the movies you collect or the playlists you listen to are causing a discomfort on the skin of your conscience, throw them outside the camp!

◆*"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have*

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*practised the latter, without neglecting the former. ..."Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."* Matthew 23:23-26, NIV.

✦ Jesus here affirms the value of their practice of Mosaic laws, but reminds them of the deeper meaning those practices were supposed to move them to.

### **✦2. Rather than condemn the hurting, tend to the hurting!**

✦ **A.** We need to remember here that these prescriptions of rituals about disease are not in the category of sin. They are in the category of "unclean". Sin also makes us "unclean" but sickness is not a moral state as "unholiness" is. And while disease and sickness are in direct correlation to sin and fallenness in general (ie, if there was no human sin there also would be no sickness or pollution), they are not always in direct correlation to personal sin and fallenness. They could be. But not necessarily. Let me explain. Does living upright morally lead to health? Normally so. Does living immorally lead to ill health? Normally so, either mentally, or physically, or spiritually. For instance, ordinarily those who are faithful to one sexual partner do not deal at all with STDs. Here moral uprightness goes obviously hand in hand with physical health.

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◆ The danger here is equating pain, sickness, and suffering with sin. While all disease originates because of sin, we may suffer from sin other than our own. We are often damaged by other people's sins too.

◆ **B.** Suffering does not always come from a specific sin. Jesus made this clear in John 9. There is a man blind from birth and the Pharisees ask Jesus whose sin was at fault, the parents', or the son's. Jesus told them this...

◆ ""Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."  
John 9:3, NIV.

◆ Jesus then healed the man. So here's Baruk, maybe 32 or 45 years old. All that time blind just so God could show what he could do through Jesus! No sin involved except the sinful state of the world itself. On the other hand, Miriam, Mose's sister did get leprosy, a skin disease, as the result of a specific sin in Numbers 12. The Bible is clear sin always leads to damage, but not always directly. (Rom.6:23) Furthermore, Jesus came seeking people in bondage to illness as well as actual sin! So rather than pass judgment on the sick or ill, or even the evil and dirty, we should be those who care about bringing healing.

◆ In fact, the modern hospital, as we've seen before, arose from the practice of Christians caring for the poor and ill. While pagan religions taught to avoid the sick and dying, the first hospitals were in outgrowths of Christians. In fact the

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first ecumenical Christian council in Nicea 325, which wrote the Nicene Creed, also directed that bishops establish a hospice in every city that had a cathedral.

◆C. Where do you see suffering in your world? Tend to it. Give to it. Volunteer in it. This is what Christians do because this is what Christ did. Wherever we preach the good news of Jesus we also practice good deeds toward those in need. Do you see suffering and filth in our city? Fight it everywhere you see it. Sin, death, sickness, litter -are the enemy of God's Kingdom and it gives him great pleasure in rescuing people from these. Christians work to give Earth the look of Heaven.

◆D. One final observation when reading the disease rituals of Leviticus 13: Verse 47-59 reads just like the stipulations for skin disease, but now applied to mildew on fabric. In fact the term translated "mildew" or "mold" is the same word translated "skin disease." Ever leave your sweaty **shirt in the closet** or locker too long and found dark spots of mildew on it? Or **mold** on the sides of a box in the basement? Again, there are health reasons we know about today that perhaps were unknown then. Mold and mildew cause sickness. The parallel between skin and clothing rules reinforces the idea that we are not talking in our text today about moral sin here, but that nonetheless, rottenness, decay, corruption -call it what you will, it isn't in God's plan, has resulted from human fallenness, and needs to be removed for healthy life.

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◆ **Conclusion:** Everything changed when Jesus entered our time and space. He didn't avoid the leper, but touched them. He didn't get contaminated. They got purified. Jesus had come to do what man could not do for himself. The premise of our text is this: decay and corruption is incompatible with the holiness of God. Jesus came to cleanse us of it. We need to get rid of it wherever possible, be it on our bodies, or on our clothing, or in our closets. Just as God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden after they sinned, so the Hebrew had to leave the camp because of disease, or burn a pair of trousers because of mold or mildew.

◆ While a rash or mold spot is not necessarily a sinful situation, these do offer a good reminder. Sin, destruction, etc. cannot exist near God. The incompatibility of death and decay with the holy presence of God is continuously demonstrated in these object lessons. We might do well to let physical troubles remind us too of spiritual realities.

◆ Next time you open a container of sour cream and find mold on the bottom of the lid, or next time you scour your shower and spray bleach on mildew in the caulking cracks, remind yourself that decay is not of heaven.

◆ In contrast, life and purity are what Jesus came from heaven to give us. And someday, at least for those whose hearts are in love with Jesus, we will enter a world where all is clean and pure all the time. No more death. No more diseases. No more polluted



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streams. No more tainted water. The spiritual reality of God's presence will fully affect the physical realities all around him and those with him. Take care of the world God has given us. Fight filth wherever you find it! But keeps your eyes on heaven. Remember things of this world pass away, but he who does the will of God lives forever.

Communion: coming glorification...

Heb 10:11-25

Let our communion with Jesus sacrifice call to mind these things:

- 1) He has made us perfect v14
- 2) We are still living into our declared value (v14b) as Paul says in Philipians, let us live up to what we've already been given!
- 3) What is coming is far cleaner, and brighter than we can now imagine! With every hour that Day approaches (v25) encourage one another and live like what lasts!