

## “Priestly Pathology” (Lev. 13)

### 1. Dermatological Disease (1-46)

#### a. Diagnoses of Skin Disease

- i. Multiple Duties included: Temple duties e.g. animal inspections, preparations, and sacrifice. Disseminating God’s Word. Diagnosing diseases in body, clothing, and housing.
- ii. Priests were the arbiters of what was clean and unclean so as to make clear distinctions between holiness, creation design, life, and prosperity and death, deformation, corruption, and disease.
- iii. Therefore, like the prescribed animals, Tabernacle structure and furnishings, ceremonies, attire, etc. was the requisite wholeness of the body (so to speak) in order to join the covenant fellowship and worship.
- iv. What all these categories distinguish is between the clean and unclean in order to worship and commune with the covenant God and community. The clean objects, animals, rituals, and people all pointed to proper function of creation’s design, wholeness or completeness, wellness, and purity (untainted-ness, if you will). Approaching the Holy One of Israel is no casual matter and offerings marked by perversions, distortions, irreverence, sickness, and all manner of contaminations are prohibited.
- v. Our attitude to worship must not be e.g. “I’ll give what’s convenient,” or “I’ll attend when convenient,” or “Let’s offer what makes us feel good.” Rather, our attitude of worship must be, “What does our King, Savior, and heavenly Father command and desire?” “How does Scripture instruct us to assemble and conduct service?” Jesus had specific instruction about bringing offerings to God viz. that if you remember you have wronged another and have failed to attempt reconciliation – don’t bother to worship. This, of course, not only applies to people but to God Himself! In fact, it especially applies to God foremost.
- vi. We must self-diagnose. Nay, we must hold up the mirror of God’s Word to diagnose us. The priests were arbiters but merely followed the prescribed protocol of the Word of the LORD. Either we are clean or unclean for worship.

#### b. Prognoses of Skin Disease

- i. Because this is a “priestly pathology” and not a physician’s biological pathology, there is no prescribed treatment. It is just a sequestering and wait and watch.
- ii. It is also of note that these described skin conditions are not indicative of contemporary ones. Furthermore, the term translated leprous is not indicative of what is now called such.
- iii. It is noted that these skin conditions all seem to have a sort of scale resemblance.
- iv. Either the disease will dissipate or remain and increase. Ultimately, the resolved cases free the victim to rejoin the community while the unresolved cases demand indefinite removal.
- v. Such a sequestering was devastating for they were a covenant community of worship and were to demonstrate holiness and purity; for their God was perfectly pure.
- vi. Disease is not always indicative of its victim’s sin. Those in good standing and in a clean mode of lifestyle were and are susceptible to disease, loss, tragedy, and death – which are all ultimately wages of sin in general. For example, Job suffered extreme loss due to no sin of his own.

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- vii. Nevertheless, in some cases the disease, distortion, or death is a direct consequence of one’s personal sin e.g. 1 Cor. 11:28-30. There Paul urged them to examine themselves before being stuck with sickness or death.
  - viii. Today, we are to examine our lives (cf. 2 Cor. 13:5ff.) and a failure to measure true or failure to correct course requires removal e.g. Mat. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:2; Titus 3:10-11.
  - ix. It was not about biological disease in Leviticus and it’s not about such today, but about spiritual diagnosis. The OT to NT correlation is found in 1 Cor. 6:19 where Paul declares our bodies are the Temple of God and that we are His possession; and thus it’s vital that we avoid being unclean by the sins which actually, immediately, and harmfully affect our bodies as well as our souls.
  - x. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that sexual sin is the direct cause of STDs which are a natural and direct consequence of said sin.
  - xi. The failure of Big Eva today is not a failure to diagnose what is physically unclean, but rather to prescribe holy living and to point out that which is spiritually/morally unclean.
- c. Prescription for Skin Disease (45-46)
- i. What is prescribed here is not a cure but a proclamation of contamination.
  - ii. Christopher Wright summarized: “The unfortunate person pronounced unclean by the priest because of a serious skin disease was required to do several things which were tantamount to mourning rites, involving *torn clothes, unkempt hair* and a *covered lower face* (45–46). In a sense he or she was virtually counted ‘dead’, since the disease had allowed death to invade a still living body, and was condemned to a life of separation from both the community and the place of worship (cf. 2 Ch. 26:21).”<sup>1</sup>
  - iii. Note the KJV NKJV add an extra step of interpretation. “Bare” or “bald” head is literally loosed, let loose, uncovered, hair.
  - iv. So the victims were to literally look scary, disheveled, and destitute to match their condition of uncleanness. They were also to yell out “unclean, unclean” when others approached so they would stay clear. They were ultimately removed from the camp – the most severe identity crisis for the Hebrew.
  - v. This was a condition of misery meant to reveal the ultimate effects of sin. But rather than admitting guilt our society revels in the lusts of the flesh and has sanitized sin and made it look even virtuous at times.
  - vi. What is the prescription for the unclean today? They are to confess their sins, repent, and turn to the Savior. Acts 17:30-31 comes to mind. And Ro. 10:9.
  - vii. The remedy is Christ and He has paid the price demanded for our transgressions. We must turn to Him and trust Him with our very lives. For He is the High Priest who purchased us with His own blood. Make no mistake about Christendom. To be a Christian is to literally belong to Christ. And know that His possessions are precious to Him. He loves you enough to take you as you are and He loves you so much that He will not leave you that way.
  - viii. Christ was acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3). And yet He being more than clean but whole and holy – He came to the leper and touched him – and thus healed him.
2. Contaminated Clothing (47-59)

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, C. J. H. (1994). [Leviticus](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 140). Inter-Varsity Press.

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- a. Like the need for cleanness and wholeness of body was such need for clothing.
- b. Mildew, mold, etc. must be eradicated or the clothing burnt. I think of another parallel of sin’s judgment and the necessity of cleansing in the NT viz. 1 Cor. 3:15 where the same fire that purifies the believer consumes all unclean motives, offerings, and works.
- c. We are to discern what is sin and sin is a contagion. Just as disease destroys the body and mildew destroys clothing; sin destroys the soul.
- d. The priests simply judged by mere physical observation of what to look for in manifestations on the skin according to God’s Word. However, God looks on the heart and considers the motives (again, 1 Cor. 3:15 and cf. Heb. 4:12).
- e. We then are also to be judges of trees by their fruit. Look for integrity. I’m not saying we need to go around like priests who left their posts and go on a witch hunt to proclaim all the unclean souls. We must go out as living Tabernacles where the Spirit resides and thus convicts the world of sin through the Church and His Word. And we offer the prescription of Christ – who makes clean the unclean.
- f. Now there is another aspect to fruit inspecting. Those who purport being good trees whilst falsely condemning other good trees is like an OT priest who observes a clean skinned person yet condemns them to outside the camp.
- g. When people are being dishonest, it is because of a personal sin in their own lives and God will deal with such.
- h. As Jude wrote, we need to “hate even the garment defiled by the flesh” (v. 23). Sin spreads and defiles what it touches unless what it touches is perfectly holy. I think of certain companies (e.g. Disney, Walmart, Chick-fil-A), networks (e.g. NBC, ABC, CBS, TBN), platforms (e.g. Twitter), organizations (e.g. Green Peace, World Vision), and even ministries (e.g. The Gospel Coalition, Christianity Today) which started out fair and yet have been defiled as a whole due to no intolerance of such defilement.

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We come to another long passage regarding clean and unclean objects. Not unlike the clean and unclean animals, the clean and unclean people and clothing were not indicative of personal sin consequences but of general tainting of the world’s sin filled and sin wrecked environment. The distinguishing of clean and unclean was to distinguish what is God’s design, demands, and desire vs what diverges from such. Like Leviticus, Paul pulled no punch when he made such moral distinctions which mark the identity of those in Christ vs those which mark the ones outside of the Kingdom. He wrote, “Now the works of the flesh are...adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like...” (Gal. 5:19-21 cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Col. 3:6). I’ll just offer a brief comment of these verses with regard to these “works of the flesh.” We all can be guilty of one or more of these sins after being redeemed. However, to continually practice such *without repentance* reveals a bad tree with rotten fruit – a divided (disloyal) heart. Only a good tree can bear good fruit. For how can one who has the Spirit of Christ residing with him refuse to repent of such lifestyles? Repentance is once for justification and continually for sanctification.

### Further Study

In a general sense, disease, along with other natural misfortunes, could be part of the effects of God’s judgment on the nation for covenant unfaithfulness (cf. Lv. 26:16), and there were exceptional cases where physical illness was a sign of God’s punishment of an individual (e.g. Nu. 12:10–15; 2 Ch.

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26:16–23). However, the persons suffering from the skin diseases described in this chapter were isolated from the community because of the visible, infectious nature of their uncleanness, not because they were regarded as sinners simply by being sick. Other kinds of sickness were not treated in this way. The blind and the deaf, for example, were not excluded from the worshipping community (which makes it more ironic that the blind man whom Jesus healed was driven out of the synagogue, in a context of misunderstanding about the link between illness and sin, after he had been healed; Jn. 9). This is significant inasmuch as both blindness and deafness were used as metaphors for the spiritual and moral effects of sin in a way that ‘leprosy’ never was in the OT. Hence, it is unlikely that ‘leprosy’ was particularly linked with sin.<sup>2</sup>

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