

# The Tipping Point

*How Clean/Unclean Distinctions Mean Everything*

- Leviticus 15:1 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,
- <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean.
- <sup>3</sup> 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.
- <sup>4</sup> Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean, and everything on which he sits shall be unclean.
- <sup>5</sup> And anyone who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.
- <sup>6</sup> 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.
- <sup>7</sup> 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.
- <sup>8</sup> 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.
- <sup>9</sup> And any saddle on which the one with the discharge rides shall be unclean.
- <sup>10</sup> 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.
- <sup>11</sup> 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.
- <sup>12</sup> And an earthenware vessel that the one with the discharge touches shall be broken, and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water.

<sup>13</sup> "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.

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> "If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>17</sup> And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> "When a woman has a discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening.

<sup>20</sup> And everything on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean. Everything also on which she sits shall be unclean.

<sup>21</sup> And whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>22</sup> And whoever touches anything on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>23</sup> Whether it is the bed or anything on which she sits, when he touches it he shall be unclean until the evening.

<sup>24</sup> And if any man lies with her and her menstrual impurity comes upon him, he shall be unclean seven days, and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.

<sup>25</sup> "If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness. As in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.

<sup>26</sup> Every bed on which she lies, all the days of her discharge, shall be to her as the bed of her impurity. And everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her menstrual impurity.

<sup>27</sup> And whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>28</sup> But if she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean.

<sup>29</sup> And on the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting.

<sup>30</sup> And the priest shall use one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her before the LORD for her unclean discharge.

<sup>31</sup> "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."

<sup>32</sup> This is the law for him who has a discharge and for him who has an emission of semen, becoming unclean thereby;

<sup>33</sup> also for her who is unwell with her menstrual impurity, that is, for anyone, male or female, who has a discharge, and for the man who lies with a woman who is unclean.

(Lev 15:1-33)

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## Outbreak

We are coming to **the end of the clean and unclean regulations** that make up **Leviticus 11-15**. Today, I want to address perhaps the most important question we can ask of them looking backwards. What do these matter? Why should anyone today care about law like these that deal with such obscure, strange, private, and even disgusting topics? We've answered this to some degree in previous chapters.

Now, I want to address it from what I think is the main point of Leviticus 15: [contagions](#).

[What is a contagion?](#) A modern *Webster's Dictionary* says it is “[the transmission of a disease by direct or indirect contact; a disease-producing agent \(such as a virus\).](#)” Consider the following meme I saw this week which is relevant in more ways than one.

- 1999-2000: Y2K is gonna kill us all
- 2001: Anthrax is gonna kill us all.
- 2002: West Nile Virus is gonna kill us all.
- 2003: SARS is gonna kill us all.
- 2005: Bird Flu is gonna kill us all.
- 2006: E.Coli is gonna kill us all.
- 2008: The bad economy is gonna kill us all.
- 2009: Swine Flu is gonna kill us all.
- 2010: BP Oil is gonna kill us all.
- 2011: Obamacare is gonna kill us all.
- 2012: Mayan “End of the world” is gonna kill us all.
- 2013: North Korea is gonna kill us all.
- 2014: Ebola is gonna kill us all.
- 2015: Disney Measles and ISIS are gonna kill us all.
- 2016: Zika is gonna kill us all.
- 2017: Fake news is gonna kill us all.
- 2018: Migrant Caravans are gonna kill us all.

- 2019: Measles is gonna kill us all.
- 2020: Coronavirus is gonna kill us all.

When I saw this, the first thing that went into my head was, *I remember almost all of those*. The second thing was, *so it isn't just Christians who have an apocalyptic view of the end of the world* (which I already knew, but this list makes easy to see).

You will notice that **most of these items are, in fact, diseases** caused by viruses or bacteria: Anthrax, West Nile, SARS, Bird Flu, E. Coli, Swine Flu, Ebola, Disney Measles, Zika, and the presently terrifying Coronavirus. However, **several of them aren't**. Y2K, a bad economy, the BP oil spill, Obamacare, the Mayan calendar, fake news, migrant caravans. And yet, put into this context, they each share something in common with the viruses and bacteria. That is, each became viewed as an epidemic that must, at all costs, be stopped or else. Or else what? Or else, *it's the end of the world*.

The thing I want you to see here is how it is more than viruses that can spread contagions. Indeed, there is another thing that all of these have in common. They are **ideas**. These ideas went **viral** throughout our culture. Sometimes, as I think is probably the case with many of the items on this list, such ideas **spread quite deliberately, like some criminal**

stealing a vial of Ebola from the CDC and then letting it go into the population. Powerful people use technologies that can be and are being manipulated to attack weakened sensitive *mental* immune systems of populations that binge feed on the media to frighten them into some kind of political submission.

Other times, **idea-contagions can spread for reasons that make almost no sense at all**. I mean, we created a specific use of the term “**viral**” to account for videos that are shared by so many people on social media that they spread “virally” throughout the population. This seemed the best word to explain this phenomenon. Frankly, many of them are probably the pop-culture kin of the common-cold, they make you sick, but that’s another story.

Nevertheless, ask yourself **why such things spread so quickly**? The answer is, most of us have no idea. We can probably all think of better produced, sillier, shorter, catchier comparisons to certain viral videos or memes that we thought should have gone viral but never did. I mean, I shared this very meme of diseases, and a whopping four other people shared it. I thought it should have gone viral. It didn’t. Why?

Someone who has thought a great deal about this question is journalist and author **Malcolm Gladwell**.<sup>1</sup> Gladwell wrote a book called *The Tipping Point*,<sup>2</sup> where he looks at the “**rules of epidemics**.” Yes, epidemics follow rules, and it isn’t just in the realm of contagious diseases.<sup>3</sup> In his *Introduction*, he looks at a 1994 case of **Hush Puppies**, the famous casual shoe founded in 1958, but which by the early 90s was down to selling so few shoes, the company almost folded, losing over half a million dollars the last quarter of 1992. But suddenly, for no understandable reason, Hush Puppies sales increased to nearly \$8 million by the same quarter of 1994.

Gladwell explains that the company was down to 30,000 pairs of shoes a year, selling them almost exclusively in backwoods outlets and small-town family stores. Then, a

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<sup>1</sup> The idea for this part of the sermon comes from **Roy Gane** (NIVAC), who quotes Gladwell and takes this whole idea of contagions to be his major “Contemporary Significance” from Leviticus 15. Given the sheer amount of verses dealing with contagions in this chapter, I think he has hit the bulls-eye on this part of his application, and I think people need to hear what he said. Hence, I’m using it for my idea heres.

<sup>2</sup> **Malcolm Gladwell**, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Actually, a super-interesting video that recently *did* go viral in fact may explain from a mathematical equation how this happens. See the fascinating, **Derek Muller**, “This Equation Will Change How You See The World,” *Veritasium* (Jan 29, 2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovJcsL7vyrk&feature=emb\\_logo&fbclid=IwAR0MD9Hh1MXc6Y\\_BMJ\\_oLoqg7eYX8JGFEZ8H1UJD5EfX7PVeXQsX2EmcwVk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovJcsL7vyrk&feature=emb_logo&fbclid=IwAR0MD9Hh1MXc6Y_BMJ_oLoqg7eYX8JGFEZ8H1UJD5EfX7PVeXQsX2EmcwVk). Muller does not take this equation out of mathematics into the realm of theology. I very much think he should have, because only God could invent something like that.

chance encounter happened where someone told the owners that **hipsters** were wearing Hushpuppies in clubs in downtown Manhattan, “**precisely because no one else would wear them.**”<sup>4</sup> Back in Michigan, the company wasn’t doing a new advertising campaign. They weren’t launching a new product. They were growing broke. But over in Manhattan, the shoes were going viral. Even though, “**No one was trying to make Hush Puppies a trend, yet somehow that’s exactly what happened.**”<sup>5</sup>

Two fashion designers from the city took an interest, and this underground rebellion to “buck the system” suddenly got support from rich and influential people. Before they could cough, Hush Puppies was selling shoes in every mall in America.

Gladwell explains, “**The best way to understand the emergence of fashion trends, the ebb and flow of crime waves, or, for that matter, the transformation of unknown books into bestsellers, or the rise of teenage smoking, or the phenomena of word of mouth, or any number of the other mysterious changes that mark everyday life [the spread of jokes, memes, viral videos, etc.] is to think of them as**

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

epidemics. Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do.”<sup>6</sup> How is that exactly?

He identifies three characteristics. “One, contagiousness; two, the fact that little causes can have big effects; and three, that change happens not gradually but at one dramatic moment —are the same three principles that define how measles moves through a grade school classroom or the flu attacks every winter. Of the three, the third trait—the idea that epidemics can rise or fall in one dramatic moment—is the most important, because it is the principle that makes sense of the first two and that permits the greatest insight into why modern change happens the way it does. The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the **Tipping Point**.”<sup>7</sup> In chemistry, they call it **saturation**, when that one single drop of food coloring turns the entire experiment red, when the first 200 drops seemed to evaporate into the clear solution.

## Leviticus 15

What does any of this have to do with Leviticus 15? This is a chapter **infamous for its fairly explicit laws** about

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 9.

unclean emissions from male and female sexual organs. As such, most people stay away from it like the plague. A quick look at the structure shows that these are in fact the content of its laws:

**A** Introduction (1)

**B** abnormal male discharge (vv. 2–15)

**C** normal male discharge (vv. 16–17)

**D** Normal husband and wife relations (18)

**C**<sup>1</sup> normal female discharge (vv. 19–24)

**B**<sup>1</sup> abnormal female discharge (vv. 25–30)

**A**<sup>1</sup> Conclusion (31–33)<sup>8</sup>

What I think skips the attention of almost everyone who reads this chapter is just how much of it is actually taken up, *not* with focusing on the emissions or even the conditions of what makes them unclean, but the sheer volume of verses that speak about **how this particular form of uncleanness becomes contagious** to everything it comes into contact with. As we will see, 19 of the 33 verses in the chapter deal directly with the contagion idea.

Now, it isn't like we have never seen this before. For instance, the chapter on **unclean animals** told us about

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<sup>8</sup> Following the basic outline in **Dorothea Erbele-Küster**, *Body, Gender and Purity in Leviticus 12 and 15*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 539, ed. Claudia V. Camp, Andrew Mein (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 61.

people contracting the unclean contagion from touching an unclean animal or a dead carcass. The laws of birthing fluids said that when the mother was not to touch anything holy during that time. The laws of “leprosy” diseases had some to do with people needing to stay away from the unclean person, clothing, or houses. But the reality is, contagion was not the main focus of those chapters. It is like the LORD was saving this idea for last. And he does it through the difficult to talk about subject of reproductive emissions.

### *Abnormal Male Discharge (Lev 15:2-15)*

Let's look at the chapter and see how this works itself out. As usual, it begins, “The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying...” (Lev 15:1). These are not Moses's ideas, they are not Aaron's. These are not laws men made up. They come from the mouth of the Word of God himself. Therefore, even though their content might cause some to not talk about them, they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. God obviously thought they were important enough to be considered an entire chapter in the Holy Bible, and we do well to understand them even today. Indeed, this was not something to be kept private among the priests, for it

commands them to, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them...” (2). They people *had* to know these things.

The content of the first law is any man who “has a discharge from his body.” The key words here are translated “body” and “discharge.” “Body” (*basar*) is almost always translated in English as “flesh.” That word can mean the whole body or just a part of it. The key to identifying which part is the word “discharge” (*zab*), which can refer to a “gush or flow.” The parallel construction is found in vs. 19 with the woman who has a “discharge” (*zob*; issue of fluid) from her body (*basar*), which is blood. That blood is then further defined as “in her menstrual (*niddah*) impurity,” which we saw back in 12:1. And so, it seems almost certain that discharge is coming from the male organ, the counterpart to the female organ. The point is, this discharge makes him “unclean” (15:2). It calls this “the law of his uncleanness for a discharge” (3).

In this case, the discharge is abnormal, something is wrong. “Whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is blocked up by his discharge.” This isn’t referring to the male seed (*zera*), the Greek *sperma*. That will come up later. Here, it is an oozing or blockage of secretive fluid caused by something. Commentators are nearly unanimous

that the “infection” here is **Gonorrhea**. However, I’m using “infection” ironically, to keep you thinking about contagions even if they aren’t physical, because this isn’t Gonorrhea, the venereal disease, which was unknown before the fifteenth century, but *gonorrhoea benigna*. This isn’t an infection at all, but a local, painful sensation accompanied by “*an increased secretion from the mucous glands of the urethra, without infection ... The principal cause is a weakness in the parts which are the seat of the disorder; occasional causes are too frequent purging, violent exercise on horseback, too frequent indulgences, cold, excess of spirituous liquors.*”<sup>9</sup> (A few have thought that it could also refer to a real physical infection caused by something like a parasite.)<sup>10</sup>

The **oozing out** or **stopping up** of the fluid is, like everything else in these cleanliness chapters, intimately related to **life**. In this case, the male organ is the principle seat of or the origin of human life. So, when something goes wrong, it signifies the opposite: sickness or death.

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<sup>9</sup> **Bartholomew Parr**, *The London Medical Dictionary* (London: Mitchell, Ames, and White William Brown, 1819). One of the primary sources for this study that modern scholars turn to is **M. M. Kalisch**, *A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament, with a New Translation: Leviticus, Part 2* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872), 155ff.

<sup>10</sup> **J. V. Kinnier-Wilson**, “Medicine in the Land and Times of the Old Testament,” in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon*, ed. T. Ishida (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 358 in **John H. Walton**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 303.

Therefore, God gave this matter of an unclean discharge to teach them the point. In fact, it isn't just Israel. **Most of the nations** at the time had similar laws on these very things, which says to me that God probably gave these kinds of laws in the days that predate Babel.<sup>11</sup>

Notice that in the case of this law, and all of the laws in Ch. 15 for that matter, there is **no priest involved**. These are **private matters**. So, the priest doesn't have to be informed, much less come and inspect anything, like he did for example with the disease laws. That means each Israelite is being put under an oath on a kind of honor system to **deal with these matters themselves**. This has ramifications for the entire community is the people will not take these laws seriously, as we will see later.

In **vs. 4** we begin to see the potential larger danger here. This begins a series of **nine straight verses** that speak about how this abnormal uncleanliness becomes utterly contagious. Not contagious in a physical sense, like the venereal disease can be under the right (or wrong!) circumstances. But rather, contagious in the religious sense.

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<sup>11</sup> See especially the discussions in **Jacob Milgrom**, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008) on this chapter.

1. Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean (4).
2. Everything on which he sits shall be unclean (4)
3. Anyone who touches his bed shall be unclean until the evening (5)
4. Whoever sits on anything that the man with the discharge has sat (6)
5. Whoever touches the body of the one with the discharge (7)
6. If the one with the discharge spits on someone who is clean (8).

**Spittle** is worth a brief comment. While some believed spit carried disease and thus some commentators think this is the reason it is included here, it could also be that spit is a **gesture of contempt** (**Num 12:14; Dt 25:9**), hated, murdering them in your heart, as Jesus said—wishing death upon someone.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the reason, it isn't all spit that brings uncleanness, only that which comes from the man with the discharge.

7. Any saddle on which he rides (9)
8. Anyone touching anything that was under him (10)
9. Anyone carries something like his saddle (10)
10. Anyone whom the man touches if he hasn't rinsed his hands (11)
11. Any earthenware vessel (12)
12. Every vessel of wood (12)

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<sup>12</sup> **John D. Currid**, *A Study Commentary on Leviticus*, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Webster, New York: Evangelical Press, 2004), 205. Adding to the text, the Rabbis fought about what other things coming from a “discharge” would make you unclean. Some included runny noses, phlegm, sweat, and so on. See **Milgrom**, 915-16.

As you can see from these, it is the idea of the discharge coming into contact with something either directly by sitting or laying or accidentally through touching. The point is, **the uncleanness spreads quickly** and without warning, like an epidemic.

Curiously, in Mesopotamian texts, the reason this is all contagious is because its source is **demonic**. “**The common notion in these contexts was that the sinner, or defiled, or diseased individual was liable to demonic attack, and it is the demons themselves who are the contagious agents.**”<sup>13</sup> There are no demons here, though there is one in the next chapter.

As you read through the list, you discover that the uncleanness lasts until evening, so, not a long period of time. But only if the infected person carries out the proper cleansing action, which is **washing and/or bathing** in fresh water whatever is unclean (**5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12**), or in the case of a clay pot (because it is porous), breaking it. Here, again, is the picture of **baptism** raising up its head in the OT laws.

This section concludes with the procedure the original unclean man must go through for cleansing. After the issue subsides, he must count out seven days and wash his clothes

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<sup>13</sup> **M. J. Geller**, “The Šurpu Incantations and Lev. V.1–5,” *JSS* 25 (1980): 188 in **Walton**, 303.

(13). We saw how dominate “seven” was in the last section, so the theme of the creation-temple continues on here. Then he must bathe his body in fresh water, and he will be clean. Then, on the eighth day, something we also saw in the previous chapter, he has to take two turtledoves or pigeons and come “before the LORD to the entrance of the tent of meeting” and give them to the priest (14). One is used for a purification offering and the other for a burnt offering (15). This will make atonement for him for his abnormal discharge.

I’ll ask a rather obvious question. What happens if the man doesn’t tell anyone about his unclean state? What if he doesn’t go to the priest. Worse, what happens if he simply doesn’t care? We will come back to the ramifications of these questions later. But here, just think about yourself. Would you want to go telling someone who was about to sit on a chair in your house, you mustn’t sit there, and when they inquire as to why, you have to tell them? You can see that it would probably be tempting to just keep the matter to yourself. But to do so was to invite the potential for spiritual disaster into the camp of the same logical end as the end that befell Nadab and Abihu. It could be that this is just a modern

question and ancient peoples were not shy in such matters, but I have a good feeling that people are people are people.

### *Normal Male Discharge (Lev 15:16-17)*

The next two verses describe what we might call **normal male discharges**. It specifies now that this is the seed, the *sperma*, the “semen.” “If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening” (16). It doesn’t specify if it was on purpose or accidental (i.e. nocturnal). It encompasses all possibilities.

Again, it is curious that Israel’s wicked neighbors to the north, the Hittites, believed that a nocturnal emission of semen was “a sign that the man has cohabited with a spirit (*succuba*), involving even an incestuous union with a deceased family member.”<sup>14</sup> There is no hint of that here. It is also worth noting that on the night **Jonathan warned David** that Saul sought to kill him, when David did not show up for dinner, Saul thought to himself, “It is an accident, he is not clean, because he has not purified himself” (1Sa 20:26).<sup>15</sup> The idea is strongly hinted at that Saul

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<sup>14</sup> In Milgrom, 927,

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

thought David had an emission which is why he wasn't at dinner. This demonstrates that people sometimes did take these laws serious, even if it turned out the Saul was quite mistaken about the reason David was absent (David was actually fleeing Saul)!

This remedy in this second section has nothing to do with offering birds through a priest. For it is natural rather than abnormal. All that must be done is the washing of any garment or skin on which the semen comes and waiting until the evening (17). But why is he then unclean? Because the life, the seed, has still left his body. But this is a level better than the previous, because it is not abnormal.

### *Normal Husband-Wife Intercourse (Lev 15:18)*

The center of the chapter is vs. 18. This is the transition verse from the man to the woman. It deals with the biblical form of sexual relations that God institutes as good: marriage (as we will see later in Leviticus, other possible relations that could obtain here are considered sin, but there is no sin involved here).<sup>16</sup> “If a man lies with a woman and

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<sup>16</sup> There is an alternative interpretation here from the grammar that it isn't intercourse at all that is in mind, but rather continues with the previous thought that when a man has a nocturnal emission, the woman he is laying beside in the bed becomes unclean. There is no sex involved. See René Gehring, “Is Sexuality Impure? An Alternative Interpretation of Leviticus 15:18,”

has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water and be unclean until evening” (18). He is unclean for the same reason he was unclean in the previous two verses. She is unclean because she has come into contact with the contagion. So, even though their relations are good, the state of uncleanness attaches itself to both people, again, not because of sin, but in order to teach Israel about the distinctions between clean and unclean so that they might consider the kind of God they approach when they go to the religious precincts.<sup>17</sup> Life, in some form, has been lost. This is the opposite of God who did not lose any of his own life to create us.

As the center of the chapter, this has the effect of reminding us again of the Garden of Eden, of the man and woman, Adam and Eve, their marriage, their relationship, their children, and how holy God made this union to be. Nevertheless, their union, as pure and good as it is, cannot compare to the holiness of the God who created them both. He did not have to lose life

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*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* (2013): 75-115.  
[https://www.academia.edu/5483817/Is\\_Sexuality\\_Impure\\_An\\_Alternative\\_Interpretation\\_of\\_Leviticus\\_15\\_18](https://www.academia.edu/5483817/Is_Sexuality_Impure_An_Alternative_Interpretation_of_Leviticus_15_18).

<sup>17</sup> I have wondered if all of the laws in this chapter wouldn't have had the interesting effect of greatly reducing the amount of work the priests would have had to do on a daily basis. I mean, many people are going to be unclean from these things during the course of any single day. And so perhaps they have a kind of underground purpose of helping the priests not be overwhelmed in what is already a seemingly impossible job of offering so many offerings and sacrifices for the nation.

to create it. And so our attention should rightly move to consider God as we think about such a law.

### *Normal Female Discharge (Lev 15:19-24)*

The hinge of the chapter now turns, and we **move to the woman**. What we are about to see was hinted at back in Ch. 12 when it talked about the fluids that come out of the woman **when she gives birth**. “When a woman has a discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual (*iddah*) impurity for seven days” (Lev 15:19). **Seven** days is again our sacred number, but it is also approximately the time a period lasts. There is a connection this has with the man. Both discharges are coming out of the *sexual* organs. And so, again, the idea of life is in view here. In her case, she is not able to spawn life during her period.<sup>18</sup> But this is still the God-created function of cleansing out a

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<sup>18</sup> Today we know that the egg and all the accompanying material is “washed out” during the period. But they also knew back then that a woman could not be impregnated at that time, even if they didn’t understand exactly why that was the case. **Thomas Hieke**, “Menstruation and Impurity. Regular Abstention from the Cult According to Leviticus 15:19-24 and Some Examples for the Reception of the Biblical Text in Early Judaism,” *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and Its Environments*, ed. Géza G.Xeravits (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), 63 [54-70].

[https://www.academia.edu/36464263/Menstruation\\_and\\_Impurity\\_Regular\\_Abstention\\_from\\_the\\_Cult\\_According\\_to\\_Leviticus\\_15\\_19-24\\_and\\_Some\\_Examples\\_for\\_the\\_Reception\\_of\\_the\\_Biblical\\_Text\\_in\\_Early\\_Judaism](https://www.academia.edu/36464263/Menstruation_and_Impurity_Regular_Abstention_from_the_Cult_According_to_Leviticus_15_19-24_and_Some_Examples_for_the_Reception_of_the_Biblical_Text_in_Early_Judaism).

woman with all that her body goes through in the time of her fertility. It is not viewed as evil or sinful. Nevertheless, she is unclean.

But again, the focus moves quite rapidly from the event **to the contagion**.

1. Whoever touches her is unclean until evening (19)
2. Everything on which she lies during her period is unclean (20)
3. Everyone one which she sits is unclean (20)
4. Whoever touches her bed is unclean until evening (21)
5. Whoever touches anything she sat on is unclean until evening (22-23)
6. Any man who lies with her during this time is unclean seven days (24)
7. Every bed on which he lies is unclean (24)

A couple of things can be pointed out here. **First**, you might recall the story of **Rachel stealing the household gods** and then telling her father she cannot move from the saddle because she is in the way of women (**Gen 31:35**). The point is not that she can't move, but that her father must not touch her or the saddle because she is unclean! If he did, he would become unclean because the pollution spreads so easily. In other words, the cleanliness laws given to Israel by the

LORD here were actually instituted much earlier, which goes along with what I said before and is the reason why everyone in the ancient world had such laws, even though they differed in ritual cleansing and length or uncleanness and reason for the uncleanness.

**Second**, why is the man suddenly unclean for seven days? Because she is. She has passed **her uncleanness onto him**. It doesn't forbid their laying together *here*; but if they do, she transmits the contagion to him and he becomes just like her. Yet, something more has to be said. Later on, Leviticus forbids their laying together during her monthly flow (**Lev 18:19; 20:18**; cf. **Ezek 22:10**). So, what would seem to be in mind here is that this act occurs **unbeknownst to them both**, because the alternative is that they must be cut off from their people if they do it intentionally (see also the righteous man of **Ezek 18:6**).<sup>19</sup>

### *Abnormal Female Discharge (Lev 15:25-30)*

The last section of the main body of laws moves now in **parallel fashion with the man** to her abnormal discharges. If she has a discharge of blood for many days, which is not her

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<sup>19</sup> Hieke, 62.

menstrual impurity, of if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, she is **unclean until it stops** (25). I'll return to this at the end. For now, continue noticing that the real emphasis is on the contagion.

1. Every bed on which she lies is unclean until the discharge stops (26)
2. Everything one which she sits is unclean (26)
3. Whoever touches these things is unclean (27)

And, just like the man with his abnormal or normal discharges, the same remedy is found. **Washing and/or bathing** the infected or contaminated things (bodies, clothing, etc.) with fresh water (21, 22, 27).

Then, similarly, once the flow stops and she is washed, she must count out **seven** days and be clean (28). Then, like the man, on the **eighth** day, she takes two turtledoves or pigeons and brings them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting (29). The priest offers one for a purification offering and one for a burnt offering (30). Then atonement is made for her before the LORD (30).

## *The Danger of an Outbreak (Lev 15:31-33)*

The chapter ends on an extremely sobering note. **Vs. 31** is a summary of not only this chapter, but all five chapters on cleanliness. “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.” Do you hear echoes of **Nadab and Abihu**? That story was a warning. This verse is showing how serious God takes these distinctions. The real and present danger is, if they do not take this seriously, God could break out against anyone and they might die. “This is the law for him who has a discharge and for him who has an emission of semen, becoming unclean thereby; also for her who is unwell with her menstrual impurity, that is, for anyone, male or female, who has a discharge, and for the man who lies with a woman who is unclean” (**32-33**).

### **The Tipping Point**

So why have I emphasized the whole idea of contagion in this chapter? In part, it is because **this is clearly its own emphasis**, though it is easy to miss because of the contents of

the laws here that create the contagion. It is much easier to become consumed with those things than it is to see how easily it spreads to everything it touches. The greater point here is to wrap up why these laws are here and why you should care about them today. Not that you should *obey them*. No, we are no longer under the Levitical covenant legislation. But *you should care about them*. How so?

Return again to the reoccurring theme that ties all of these cleanliness laws together, that is the close association they all have with *life and death*. Understood properly, cleanliness laws are there to teach you a couple of important theological truths. First, they point out the obvious, that you are *mortal*. If all unclean things have at their root a loss of life or an infection or smell or analogy of death, then the unclean person's morality has to be near the top of things you think of when you want to understand their purpose.

*You are mortal*. You are going to die. No one can avoid this. Along with taxes, as the saying goes, this is the only other inevitable thing in life. If you are mortal, then you must think long and hard about what that means. How did we get this way? Is there anything that can be done about it? And so on.

Along those same lines, a second thing you are to think of is that **God is immortal**. God is life. He is the opposite of you and I and all other things. He is the Creator. You are the creature. It is the fact that these cleanliness laws deal primarily with coming into close proximity with God in the religious precincts that causes this part of the thinking. These laws are not about sin. They are about what happens with something that is unclean comes into close proximity to God, even if that unclean thing is still morally upright as it regards the specific law! That outcome is, as **vs. 31** told us, **extremely dangerous** and **potentially deadly**.

So what is it about the contagion? **First**, consider the close conceptual counterpart found in **Romans 5:12**. “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...” The first connection is “**death**.” The second is “**spread**.” Sin is a contagion, just like touching things that are unclean is contagious. In fact, both are highly contagious. So though sin is not involved per se, it certainly is, as we will see, lurking like a virus below the skin.

Have you wondered recently how it is that our **culture has become so morally unhinged** in **such a short period of time**? It isn't that there wasn't diseased and contagious

thoughts until just recently. It is that they hadn't reached **the tipping point**. But suddenly, they have. Why?

Let me explain to you how Ezekiel thought about this same kind of thing. In the same chapter that deals with some of these very laws from Leviticus 15 (for example **Ezek 22:10** and laying with a woman during her menstrual impurity), the prophet says,

Her **priests** have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

Her **princes** in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain.

And her **prophets** have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, "Thus says the Lord GOD," when the LORD has not spoken.

The **people** of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice.

(**Ezek 22:26-29**)

This is an extremely sobering text. All three offices of Israel: **prophet, priest, and king** are called out and the result

of their wickedness works its way to “the people” like a highly contagious virus infecting an entire population. Think the [Spanish Flu](#) pandemic of 1918 that took 2 ½ times more people than the combined dead of WWI, or think [Black Plague](#) of 1350 that they say took 1/3 of all humans living in Europe, and you are starting to scratch the surface of the problem Ezekiel is stating here. Ezekiel is actually talking about something much worse.

What does he start with? He starts not with the prophets, but with the [priests](#), and of all the things the priests were doing, he picks this out as the one that begins the pandemic: [They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean.](#) To me, [that’s terrifying.](#) Laws that people today couldn’t care less about are the ground zero, the Wuhan Market of a spiritual Coronavirus that is working its way through a culture like a pandemic. This is what happens when people don’t care about such things. They think like Boromir, [“It is a strange fate that we should suffer so much fear and doubt over so small a thing ... such a little thing.”](#) But it is not a small thing at all.

So what happens? What does the pandemic actually look like? Roy Gane puts it very well,

Notice that blurring ritual distinctions was accompanied by ethical sins. When the Lord was “profaned among them” (Ezek 22:26) through disrespect for his holy things and holy time (Sabbaths), there was nothing to restrain stronger members of society from preying on those who were weaker. When God was lowered to the common level through a false priestly presentation, the people were ready to accept a deceptive prophetic “vision” that supported rather than opposed social injustice. Thus, the moral “immune system” of Judah was destroyed.<sup>20</sup>

Welcome to the U.S.A. and Western Civilization circa 2020. The root problem is this “profaning” of God. Specifically, he argues, and I think he is right, it is the “erosion of respect for God’s immortal nature, which contrasts with human mortality” that:

inevitably leads human beings to underestimate their accountability to him. They lose the healthy fear of God that Christ encapsulated: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). As the immortal Source and Sustainer of life, God holds absolute power over human beings, who can and do die. He allows sinners to die so that they will not

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<sup>20</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 264–265.

immortalize sin and all the infectious misery that goes with it (Gen 3:22–24).<sup>21</sup>

You see, it is **the forsaking of the invisible truth** that unclean distinctions **are real** that causes the world, the flesh, and the devil to attack individuals and cultures like viruses. And once the tipping point is reached, all out moral chaos ensues. Ancient peoples were terrified of this ... in *every* culture. Modern people are most likely sooner than later going to figure that terror out firsthand. But it isn't just a culture. It is also the individual.

Those who refuse to bow to the Son will meet their end, and all those apocalyptic scenarios spoken of earlier will seem like a day in paradise compared to the Judgment of the Son of God. **“Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body,”** Jesus warned. But be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell (*gehenna*).

If this is all true, then what possible solution could there be the? Someone might argue, **maybe we should return to the clean and unclean laws of Leviticus.** That way, such distinctions would always be on our minds. But **no**, friend, that isn't a good solution at all. These laws were yokes that

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<sup>21</sup> Gane, 264.

put people into great slavery to them. While these laws might curb sin, they also create slavery to themselves. The entire NT is one huge apologetic about how these laws were **typological**.

The thing about types is that they do not erase the reality behind them. What you have to understand here is that clean and unclean distinctions still matter to God. They just look different in like of the coming of the Light and Life to men. Listen to Paul. He doesn't utterly erase these distinctions. "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean" (**Rom 14:14**). Or, "What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty'" (**2Co 6:15-18**). We do not have time or space to look into these things here. All I want to point out is that the NT has not

entirely rid itself of clean/unclean distinctions. And that's one reason why knowing the Law is important.

But you must not stay in the shadows of these laws and let yourself be plagued with unnecessary torment about what happens if you violate any one of them in these five chapters, as Orthodox Jews, for example still do to this day. You must understand how the types are fulfilled and what is considered clean and unclean today. In this regard, let me call your attention to just one story in the life of the Lord Jesus.

This is the story of the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Luke tells us she had spent all her savings on doctors (as one himself, Luke surely had sympathy for her), but she could not be healed (Luke 8:43). If you don't stop to think of the context, that she has been unclean for all this time, the looks she got, the snickers, the shunning she would have received, then you will have missed the point.

Jesus had been casting out unclean spirits and it is the story of Jairus' daughter that bookends her story. As the contagion of Jesus' popularity begins to grab hold of the masses, suddenly this woman, hidden by the hordes, managed to press up and touch the fringe of his garment, and suddenly her discharge of blood ceased (44). Jesus perceived

that this had happened, for “power” had gone out of him. He questioned the crowd (45) and the trembling woman fell down at his feet (47). Rather than scream, “Unclean!” “Jesus told her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace’” (48).

This remarkable story only concludes once the dead girl is raised, showing us the truly remarkable power of the Son of God. And so this is it—nothing unclean that touches him does anything except become clean ... *by faith*. This recognition starts because people understand that oozing forth from his life *is Life*, not Death. He is the Life of men. The clean/unclean distinctions have only one sphere now: Are you in Christ and clean or outside of him and unclean. That’s it.

Please, hear his call today. For he bid you to be cleansed by his blood by *acknowledging two things*. First, your sin and your mortality. Death spread to all men, because all sinned. Even our righteous acts are as *unclean rags*, Isaiah says (*Isa 64:6*). You do understand that this isn’t the rag of an auto mechanic soiled in oil, but the rags of a woman during menstruation (*iddah*, the same word used in Lev 12 and 15).

Second, the state of perfect Life and Immortality that comes from the absolute purity and holiness of God’s Being

come through Christ who is sufficient. Jesus has provided atonement that deals with both of these problems, forgiving sin and keeping you from the Second Death by giving you immortal life. He became death on the cross that you might be forgiven and have life. This is the same message Leviticus itself will move into with the very next chapter being the Day of Atonement. This is deliberate.

Isaiah bid the people, “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil” (Isa 1:16). This is still the call, but as his book also points out, only Christ can make a person clean and whole and fully alive and even want to begin removing those evil deeds to God’s glory through the Holy Spirit who has now made them clean. Christ alone stops the contagion in its tracks before it has the ability to take you to eternal death. He alone can stop the epidemic in our culture or in your own heart. Believe and bow you knee to him. See how merciful he is to those outcasts who suffer their whole lives with unclean conditions. Fall upon his mercy. He is the tipping point for anyone struggling with such things. Because in him, all is made clean, to the Glory of God the Father.

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