

Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church

Healing for the Leprous House (Leviticus 14:33-54)

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5/18/2014

This morning, I want us to look once more at this chapter in Leviticus that we looked at a several weeks ago when we considered the ritual of cleansing that God appointed for lepers under the Old Covenant who had been healed of leprosy. God made provision for such individuals to be restored to the life of the covenant community, if they were healed of their disease. At the end of that chapter, we find instructions for dealing with a house that had become infected with a condition the Bible also calls "leprosy." Now, obviously, a house cannot be infected with the disease of leprosy that afflicts human beings. What this is referring to is some type of spreading fungus or mildew that would get into the walls of a house and produce a foul and repulsive appearance that made it resemble an infectious skin disease in human beings. We don't know the exact nature of the condition described. We do know that even today in Israel, during Israel's rainy season (from October through March), both along the coast and by the Sea of Galilee, there is a problem with mildew growing on the walls of houses, because of the high level of humidity in the air at that time. We are not unfamiliar with similar problems affecting homes in the Ark-la-Tex. Some homes are rendered unlivable by black mold. It has been referred to as "killer mold" because of the health hazards associated with it. One article on black mold said that "across the country, black mold is causing people to abandon buildings, close schools and leave beautiful homes sitting vacant." So even our in own day, people sometimes have to face the problem of dealing with what the Bible would call a "leprous house."

Nevertheless, because the rituals appointed in this chapter appear so strange to us, we might think at first that the teaching recorded here on "leprous houses" has no real relevance for us living in the second decade of the twentieth century. We are so far removed from the situation described here; surely, we think that these verses, written so long ago, can have no practical application to our lives as Christians. We must remember, however, the words of apostle Paul to Timothy concerning the perpetual relevance of all inspired Scripture for the people of God: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16). If that is so, that means that even a passage like this-- which seems so far removed from our present experience-- is in fact, full of instruction for our us, if only we will read it in light of the coming of our Lord

Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church

Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. It is the cross of Christ that illumines the meaning a passage like this and enables us to see its spiritual application to our lives. Keep in mind, all the ceremonies of the Old Covenant, though they dealt with physical realities, foreshadowed in a typical manner the work of God in dealing with spiritual realities through Jesus Christ. That being the case, we can know without any doubt that the principles set down here for dealing with a "leprous house" have spiritual application to our lives in the present day.

Let's consider first the character of these instructions that God gave to the nation of Israel. Then we'll look more closely at their content.

I. The Character of These Instructions

A. Prospective--The first thing to point out about the character of these instructions is that they are prospective, that is, forward-looking; they have in view a state of affairs that did not yet exist when these instructions were first given. This was the first law that was given to Israel which had no bearing on their present condition; it was given to regulate their conduct in the future, when they reached the Promised Land. At the time they received these words, however, they were still in the Sinai desert; many long years would pass before they would find themselves in the land which God had promised to their forefathers. Nevertheless, God wanted to prepare them for that future state of affairs, so He spoke them about things that were still future.

I think we can draw a lesson even from this, and that is that teaching which may not seem relevant to our present circumstances may still be important and even necessary to prepare us for circumstances that we will face in the future. Consider, for example, the Bible's teaching on marriage. Is that teaching of relevance only for married couples? Is it not also relevant for young people who are single, but who hope to marry some day? Is it not good for them to consider God's design for marriage before they marry, that it might shape their thinking and prepare them for a coming day when God may be pleased to bless them with a spouse? We should never think that a teaching is unimportant, just because we fail to see how it applies to our lives at the present moment. Someday, we may find it very needful, so we do well to store it in our hearts and save it for a future day.

This principle of preparing for the future also provides a strong argument for preachers to preach systematically through books of the Bible. When a preacher does that, he touches on a wide range of themes, some of which may not seem to be relevant at the time he preaches, but which may be needed in for the future. So this ought to be our goal, to study the "whole counsel of God" in order to be armed for

Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church

future battles. We are to hide God's truth in our hearts in the present, so that we may apply it as the need arises.

B. Pious-- The second thing we can say about these instructions to Israel is that they are pious; by that I mean, they breathe a spirit of reverence toward God by acknowledging Him as the ultimate cause of all things. His sovereign will is the source of every blessing and every adversity that the children of Israel will face in the future. Look at verse 34: "When you have come into the land of Canaan, which I give you as a possession, and I put the leprous plague in a house in the land of your possession." Notice that God is the One who will bring the Jews into the Promised Land, and He is the One who will put a leprous plague in certain houses. God is not denying the role of secondary causes; but He is affirming His own sovereign will as the first cause of all events. Whenever a calamity strikes a community involving the destructive forces of nature, although on one level, we may explain what happened in terms of nature itself; God Himself must be acknowledged as the ultimate cause of the calamity. For example, the recent calamity in Little Rock that leveled so many homes, destroyed so much property, and even took human lives, what caused it? If we stop at saying, "It was caused by a tornado," then we lose sight of the fact that God directs the winds in their course. As one writer puts it, "All that is done is in a sense done by God; inasmuch as his providence rules over all; and therefore, by whatever secondary cause a thing may be brought about, It is He that does it. It is God that feeds the birds, God that clothes the grass, nor does one sparrow fall to the ground without Him. It is He, therefore, that puts the plague in a house, as the Lord of all things." If the awareness of God's sovereignty over all events does not instill in us a sense of pious reverence, then nothing will. It behooves us to feel our dependence on God's sovereign will as the source of every blessing we enjoy.

C. Preventive-- A third word to describe the character of these instructions is the word preventive. God gave these instructions to His people in order to prevent, if at all possible, the loss of property. If the children of Israel would only pay heed to the Lord's instructions, and respond quickly in the way God commanded at the first sight of mildew on the walls of their houses, then there was the possibility of nipping a serious problem in the bud and saving a house from total ruin. The leprous plague could be stopped before it spread, and the house could be saved. Only, they had to act promptly at the first sign of trouble; otherwise, if they waited too long, the plague would spread, and the dwelling would be condemned to destruction.

D. Prophetic-- One final word to describe these instructions is the word prophetic. By that I mean, not only that these words inspired by God, but that, being divine in origin, they have a meaning that goes far beyond their literal, physical meaning. In terms of

Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church

their literal meaning, they applied to the children of Israel only, to whom the Law of Moses was given; but in terms their spiritual meaning, they apply to us as well. That's because the image of a house in Scripture has metaphorical significance that cannot be ignored; and that gives this passage a meaning that transcends its literal, physical meaning.

That leads us now to consider in greater detail the content of this prophecy.

II. The Content of These Instructions

These instructions prescribe a series of steps by which a householder who discovered a suspicious fungus or mildew growing on the walls of his house, could take action to prevent the total loss of his dwelling.

The problem with a mildew or fungus in the house was not so much that it presented a health hazard-- although that is certainly possible-- but that it was considered ceremonially defiling. That is clear from the fact that God uses the term "leprosy" to describe it. You will remember that the healed leper was not permitted to re-enter the camp of Israel simply because he had been healed of his disease. No; he had to undergo certain cleansing rituals first, and that is because his disease had made him ceremonially unclean. The same is true here with regard to what God calls a "leprous house." The presence of spreading mildew on the walls of a house made it ceremonially unclean; and until it had been cleansed thoroughly by an authorized priest, it was not a fit dwelling to live in.

Now, I said a moment ago that these instructions are meaningful a spiritual level. How so? Well, just as leprosy is used in the Bible to symbolize sin, so the image of a house in the Bible is used to symbolize a community of people who live in a close relationship with one another. In particular, there are three communities in the Bible to which the term "house" is frequently applied.

1) The family-- First of all, the word "house" can refer to a family or household. This is true in both the Old and New Testaments. Both the Hebrew word for house, *bayith*, and the Greek word for house, *oikos*, can refer either to the physical structure in which people dwell-- a building made of stones, mortar, wood, and plaster-- or it can refer to the people who live inside that building, the family or household. In the book of Acts, therefore, we read of the household of Cornelius, the household of Lydia, the household of the Philippian jailer, and the word is equivalent to the word "family," although the concept of family may be broad enough to include household servants. So the first community represented by the metaphor of a house is a family.

Tecarkana Reformed Baptist Church

2) The nation-- Families grow, however; and as they grow in size, and as children grow up and leave their parents' home to start their own households, that original family may grow over time into a nation. So the word "house" is also applied to nations in the Bible. The family of Jacob grew over time into the nation of Israel, and Israel is frequently referred to in Scripture as a house. God told the prophet Ezekiel, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 3:17). Jesus told his disciples when he commissioned to preach, "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). The apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost said to his fellow Jews, "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). So the word house can refer to an earthly nation of people.

3) The church-- Thirdly, the metaphor of a house is also used of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul, for example, refers to the local church as a house when he tells Timothy that he is writing him "so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). The apostle Peter refers to the universal church throughout the whole world as constituting one spiritual house in the Lord. In his first epistle, he tells his readers, "As living stone, you are being built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). Likewise, the writer to the Hebrews describes Jesus as "a Son over his own house," then adds "whose house we are" (Heb. 3:6). So the word "house" can be used in a metaphorical sense to refer to families, nations, and churches.

If that is so, what is the moral or spiritual application of the instructions given here in Leviticus 14? What we have before us is a house infected with leprosy. If leprosy in the early part of this chapter symbolizes sin, that is what it must symbolize here. So the image of a house becoming infected and defiled by a leprous plague teaches something very important about sin. Not only can sin defile individual lives, represented by the leper, but it can defile entire communities, as well, represented by the house. A family, a church, an entire nation can be infected by a grotesque and flagrant outbreak of sin that spreads like cancer throughout the entire community, bringing defilement and threatening the continued existence of that community. If such flagrant, glaring sin is not dealt with-- if it becomes pervasive and systematic and resists all effort to eradicate it-- then such a community truly beyond hope of remedy. It then falls under the final condemning judgment of God, and it will be pulled down brick by brick and its unclean rubble carried off to an unclean place.

If that is so, how we ought to respond if we see flagrant sin breaking out in a community to which we belong? What we see in this chapter are three distinct stages

Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church

for dealing with sin in a community. They are, what I call, the diagnosis stage, the disinfection stage-- and if that proves ineffective-- you have the demolition stage. Let's consider what takes place at each stage in the effort to save a house from the leprous plague of sin.

Stage 1-- The Diagnosis Stage-- The first thing that had to happen, when a suspicious stain on the wall was spotted is that the owner of the house had to contact the priest, so that He could make a proper diagnosis. We read in verse 35, "and he who owns the house comes and tells the priest, saying, 'It seems to me that there is some plague in the house.'" This the first thing that needs to happen when there appears to be an outbreak of sin in a community-- the priest must be notified. From a New Testament perspective, we know what that means. We need to tell our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, that a problem exists in our house, and we need His help to diagnose the problem accurately. If we take "house" here to mean the family, then notice, it is the head of the house who has a particular responsibility to deal with sin in his own family. That is part of what is involved in being the spiritual leader of one's home. Men, do we realize how gravely we sin against the Lord if, as the spiritual leaders of our home, we turn a blind eye to, or ignore any developing sin problem in our home. The Lord will hold us especially accountable for being negligent in this regard, for the future prosperity of our homes depends on our being watchful against the first outbreak of any "leprous plague" in our home. I am not saying that wives do not share in this responsibility-- they obviously do-- but God holds the man especially accountable to be a watchman on the wall of his house, since he is the head of the home. As such, we must be on the lookout for problems in the home, and respond to them promptly when they arise.

What sort of problems do I have in mind? Well, these can include marital problems, a breakdown in communication between husband and wife, leading to alienation or bitterness. It can also include parent-child conflicts that can arise for various reason-- perhaps, a failure on the part of parents to discipline rebellious children, or on the other hand, a failure to show proper forbearance and patience with one's children, so that discipline becomes overly harsh. There are obvious problems that can enter the home through the internet, the television, and other channels by which corrupting influences can pollute the atmosphere of a godly home and disturb the domestic tranquility of Christ-centered family life. At all times, parents are responsible to watch over what enters the home and what enters the lives of their children. When we think of sin entering the home, however, we must think of sins of omission, as well as sins of commission. Home life can deteriorate not only through the bad things we do, but through the good things we fail to do. When parents neglect

Tecarkana Reformed Baptist Church

to teach their children the Word of God, when they fail to pray with their children, or lead in family worship, or model for them consistent Christian discipleship, or when they fail to spend time cultivating family relationships, these areas of neglect over time take their toll on a household. Just as a house can develop mold and mildew on the walls through sheer neglect, the same is true in family life.

Nevertheless, in ourselves, we are incompetent to diagnose adequately the root of problems in our home, and that is why, when we see a problem developing, we need to call on the Lord Jesus Christ to diagnose the problem. Under the Old Covenant, that diagnosis process could take a week. The priest would come and examine the walls of the house, and if the spreading fungus on the wall appeared to him to be fairly serious - not a mere superficial stain, but something that went deep into the wall, creating indentations or ruts or depressions in the surface of the wall, he would close the house up for a period of seven days, after removing everyone and everything from the house. On the seventh day, he would inspect the house again; and if the plague had spread, he would give orders for drastic measures to be taken to deal decisively with the problem of the spreading plague. This is what I call the disinfection stage.

Stage 2-- the Disinfection Stage-- Now the priest would give orders that whatever part of the house was infected be surgically removed, so to speak, to prevent the infection spreading further. The stones affected by the plague would be taken out of the wall, and the surrounding stones would be thoroughly scraped. Then the infected stones and the dust scraped from the surrounding stone would all be disposed of in an unclean place outside the city, which may have been a place like a city dump, where refuse was taken and burned; and new stone would be brought in to fill up the hole left by the discarded stones.

This operation reminds me of what had to be done to wounded soldiers during the War Between the States. If they were shot had a musket ball lodged in their leg, and if the leg became infected, they would have to amputate it in order to prevent the spread of infection throughout the entire body. It was a radical measure, but necessary in order to preserve life.

Likewise, to preserve the spiritual life of a home or a church, radical measures must be taken. Stumbling blocks must be removed for the sake of purity. That may mean getting rid of a T.V. or a computer-- or at the very least, changing your habits in how you use these things. There is no checklist of regulations to decide these things for you. Only the Lord can show you exactly the steps that you need to take to set things right in your home, when things have gone wrong. He is the One with authority to diagnose the problem and authority to command what must be done in response to

Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church

the problem. That is why we must seek the Lord earnestly when trouble enters the home, and be willing to do whatever His Word commands to deal with sin.

The temptation is to turn a blind eye to sin, to minimize it, or to justify it. How many Christian parents have turned a blind eye to things happening in the lives of their children which they ought to have noticed and addressed. How many churches have turned a blind eye to flagrant sin in a church member, out of a desire to avoid causing controversy or provoking hurt feelings. "I just don't want to rock the boat," they say. Or, "I just don't want to get involved in something that's none of my business," forgetting the fact that guarding the holiness of Christ's church is every Christian's business. So they turn a blind eye to glaring sin in the church. That's what the Corinthians were doing with one church member who was living openly in an illicit relationship with his mother in law. They looked away and prided themselves on their tolerance. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their inaction, which was bringing defilement on the church. "Your glorying is not good," he told them, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you are unleavened." The Corinthians were to take decisive action in dealing with sin, by repenting of their own wrong attitude, and removing the sinning member from the fellowship of the church. To leave the polluting offender as a member of the church would be like leaving a gangrenous leg on a body. Such inaction could only bring the death of the community by its gradual decline into apostasy.

We see the same thing happening today in professedly Christian denominations that refuse to deal with sin. People in those denominations are simply turning a blind eye to rebellious pastors who refuse to abide by the teachings and practices of their church. In one denomination, a retired pastor was permitted to keep his credentials and continue his ministry, even after he had defied the teaching of the church by performing a so-called same-sex wedding ceremony. After giving him a slap on the wrist, church leaders just looked the other way. In this same denomination, a woman preacher, after declaring herself to be a "proud, active, self-avowed lesbian" married to another woman, was also permitted to keep her credentials and ministry position, as church leaders looked the other way. Such flagrant refusal to deal with sin is the very thing that brings down on any professing church God's condemnation and final judgment.

Under the Old Covenant, if a house resisted all efforts at disinfection, because the leprous plague kept coming back and breaking out again in the house, even after the infected stones were removed and replaced by clean stones, then the priest had to come and make a solemn pronouncement. He had to declare it an unclean house--which was the same thing as declaring it a condemned house.

Tecarkana Reformed Baptist Church

Stage 3-- Demolition Stage-- That brings us to the third stage of dealing with a leprous plague in a house-- the demolition stage. If flagrant, visible sin in a community is not dealt with, the community will reach a point of no return in which it is essentially doomed. It moves into a terminal stage in which death is inevitable. Just as cancer, left untreated, will metastasize throughout the whole body, so that it can no longer be removed, the same thing is true with sin. At that point, nothing remains to be done but to demolish the house.

In this regard, Matthew Henry writes, "The leprosy of sin, if it be obstinate under the methods of cure, will at last be the ruin of families and churches. If Babylon will not be healed, she shall be forsaken and abandoned."

We think of certain families in the Bible that came to an end because of the refusal of the patriarch to deal with sin in the family-- for example, the family of Eli. Although he weakly rebuked his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, for the great wickedness they were committing, he refused to remove them from their office. He tolerated the evil his sons were committing, and as a result, God eventually brought down the house of Eli. "All the descendants of your house," God told Eli, "will die in the flower of their age." (1 Samuel 2:33). What is true of families is true of churches, as well. If churches refuse to deal with glaring sins in their community life, but continue to tolerate those sins and turn a blind eye to them, they stand in danger of disappearing from the face of the map. That was true of the church of Ephesus to which Jesus sent a love letter in Revelation 2:1-7. That letter expressed Jesus' love for the Ephesians, but at the same it expressed an urgent call to them to repent of their coldness of heart and an urgent warning of the consequences if they failed to do so: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and to the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent." The message is clear; flagrant sin in churches must be dealt with decisively, or it threatens the continued life of the church.

This chapter does not end on a negative note, however, for the flipside of what I have said is also true. If families, and churches, and even nations do respond to correction, by hearing God's voice, and confessing the evil of sin, and turning in heartfelt repentance to the Lord, such communities can be restored. Families can be restored to a state of relational harmony and peace; ties of warm affection can be renewed and strengthened, as sin is dealt with in the home. Churches can be revived, and even nations can undergo spiritual awakenings, when the gospel is preached boldly and multitudes respond properly as the hammer of the Word breaks hearts of stone, and the precious water of God's Spirit falls on parched and thirsty souls like rain from heaven.

Tecumseh Reformed Baptist Church

Verses 48-53 describes the cleansing ritual that was performed to remove ceremonial defilement from a house that responded properly to invasive measures taken to cleanse it of a leprous plague. The ceremony is identical to that which was performed for a healed leper. What a happy scene that is, that instead of being demolished, the house in trouble was delivered from the plague that infected it, and cleansed thoroughly of its defilement.

May the Lord be pleased to give us homes that respond rightly to His cleansing Word. May He be pleased to show mercy to our nation, by granting spiritual awakening. Sometimes I fear that our nation may have past that point of no return; that the cancer of unbelief and false pagan religion has metastasized to such a degree throughout the society, that God has already pronounced our nation's house unclean and called for its demolition. I pray that this is not so. Let us pray that God will be pleased to pour out His grace in abundance on our nation once again for the sake of His people who cry out to Him continually on the nation's behalf; but until and unless that day comes, let us pray for God's grace to be magnified in our homes and local churches, that may be free of the leprous plague of flagrant sin. Amen.