

We need to remember that Leviticus is all about the question of how humanity –
and particularly how Israel, my firstborn son –
can ascend God’s holy mountain –
how can sinful humanity enter the presence of a holy God?!

Tonight we are looking at how male and female connect to this question.

We have seen how the garden in Eden was the holy place where God met with humanity.
And it was in the garden where God created man, male and female,
and told them “be fruitful and multiply.”
And it was in the garden – after the fall –
that God promised that the seed of the woman would crush head of the serpent.

The apostle Paul reflects on this when he says that the woman is the glory of the man.
What does it mean to be the *glory* of something?
Well, listen to how Paul says it:
“a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God,
but woman is the glory of man.”

Eve was created from Adam, her head, as his glory.
What does that mean?

Well, think also of how Scripture uses this!
Jerusalem – Zion – the church – is portrayed as the bride of Christ.
Our eternal joy and peace in the New Creation is portrayed as a *bride* –
the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven arrayed for Christ, our husband!

I like how Mark Garcia puts it:

“The biblical Lady Jerusalem and Mother Jerusalem are not figures in the sense that they are somehow less real and less relevant to how we think of the feminine; to the contrary, she is *most* real and *most* relevant. To ask, then, about the *why* of biblical teaching regarding men and women in relationship, marriage and its bliss or burdens, and the forms of faithful ecclesiastical order and life is to ask what is the significance of this prominent and consistent biblical motif.”

Woman is portrayed in scripture – and especially we see this here in Leviticus 15 –
as a picture of the holy place.

This is why scripture has no patience with sexual violence –
or other forms of neglect and oppression.
Men who fail to act with priestly care and concern for the women in their lives –
are acting abusively.

The temptation for man is to use his authority for his own purposes.

Bernard of Clairvaux once wrote,

"No poison or sword ought to terrify you as much as the lust for domination." ~
Bernard of Clairvaux to his pupil, Pope Eugene.

But the temptation for woman is the temptation of the "glorious ones" in Scripture:

"to confuse her glorious status with the notion that she no longer needs
the one whose glory she in fact is." (Mark Garcia)

1. Irregular Male Discharges (v1-15)

a. The Uncleanness of the Man with a Discharge (v1-12)

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

There are two basic parts to the chapter:

the first 17 verses deal with male discharges,
verse 18 functions as the hinge;
while verses 19-30 deal with female discharges.

The section on males itself has two parts:

verses 2-12 refers to discharges other than sperm.
A foreign substance could render a man unclean.

The idea is that there is a mixture going on in a man's private parts.

There is a substance there that does not belong.

So if a man has a discharge—other than sperm—he is unclean,
and everything he touches, or which touches him, also becomes unclean.

It's worth pointing out that the male appendage has a dual use:

it is useful for the production of life –
and it is useful for the production of waste.

If other stuff is coming out – that’s not good!

You can have discharges from any other part of your body,
and not be unclean –
but a discharge from there
at least represents a malfunction of the seed.

And where there is no seed, there is no life.

b. The Eighth Day Cleansing of the Man with a Discharge (v13-15)

¹³ “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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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.

This explains why his cleansing is on the eighth day.

As we have seen throughout Leviticus,
the eighth day is the day of the new creation.

And so after seven days, he washes his clothes and his body,
and on the eighth day he takes two doves or two pigeons to the LORD
as a sin offering and as a burnt offering.

Do you see the new creation image?

The man’s “seed” has been compromised by this foreign substance.
This condition renders him unclean,
for if a man cannot produce, then he cannot partake in the worship of God.
(See Dt 23, which forbade the emasculated to enter the assembly of Yahweh).
The worship of God in the OT is entirely dependent upon the promise of the seed.
For without the seed of Abraham – there is no salvation.

Therefore, on the eighth day, the man would bring the sacrifice
to remove the impurity of his seed.

2. Ordinary Uncleanness (v16-24)

a. Ordinary Male Emissions (v16-17)

¹⁶ “If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening. ¹⁷ And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water and be unclean until the evening.

In verses 16-17 we hear that any emission of semen renders a man unclean.
Not the seven day version – but just until evening.

The point is that a man's seed is properly for procreation.
If he spills it on anything else, he – and it – become unclean.

You'll notice throughout the chapter that there is no moral comment about good or bad.
The focus is exclusively on the question of clean and unclean.

Centerpoint: (v18)

I should have highlighted verse 18 as the centerpoint of the chiasm.
We have moved from irregular male discharges to “ordinary emissions” –
and in the second half of the chapter we will talk about ordinary menstruation,
and then move on to irregular female discharges.

But here at the center of the chapter is the thing
that throws a wrench in the “improper function” theory of uncleanness.

Proper function is very useful as a *part* of what Leviticus is doing with clean and unclean.
But if you ignore the tabernacle and how we approach God –
proper function falls short!

If you try to explain uncleanness simply in terms of “improper function”
then verse 18 makes no sense.

Verse 18 describes the most proper functioning situation of all!

¹⁸ 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.

God himself had commanded, “Be fruitful and multiply” –
so sexual relations between husband and wife are commanded by God –
and yet doing what God commands could render you unclean...?

Hebrews 13:4 even says “let the marriage bed be kept undefiled” –
so plainly there is nothing “improper”
about ordinary sexual relations between husband and wife.

But Leviticus 15 is talking about sexual physiology (not just sexual processes).
Is the reproductive system functioning so as to bring about reproduction?
“Or is there some physiological deviation from ordinary sexual processes?” (Garcia)

At the beginning and at the end of our passage, we see pathological deviations –
if a man is having a discharge, then his sexual physiology is not going to work;

if a woman has a continuing discharge, then she will be unable to bear children.

“Neither discharge can lead to the creation of life.”

The middle sections – the man’s solo emission or the woman’s menstruation – are not pathological – but they do not facilitate reproduction.

(You might say it is “normal” – but totally incapable of producing life!)

Verse 18 – at the heart of the chapter – portrays sexual reproductive physiology in its fully functional setting.

The degree of impurity decreases as we move from the irregular at the beginning and end, to the ordinary uncleanness of emissions and menstruation – but even in ordinary sexual relations, both male and female wind up unclean.

Now – this is the key –
Why is there still impurity *here* – at the center?

Jump down to verse 31.

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

If the body is not cleansed from discharges in this way, then the tabernacle is defiled.

But think about the picture that our passage is giving us!

If your wife is a picture of the holy place – then when you *go in* to your wife, it is a picture of the priest entering the holy place.

The tabernacle was the center of Israel’s wilderness camp – and now – at the end of Exodus 40 – the glory of the LORD has entered the Most Holy Place.

God himself is with us!
And those who would approach the center of the camp must themselves be “clean.”
Only clean animals can be brought as sacrifices.
Outside the camp are the unclean – those moving toward death and unlife.

So why does this picture of holiness render you unclean?
Well, what is the purpose of a man’s seed?

To “be fruitful and multiply.”

If a man’s seed does not take root in his wife,
then it has fallen short of its purpose!

And this is where it gets a little sticky to know how to say this!
Waste products belong to the realm of death, outside the camp.
(Deuteronomy 23:12-14 insists that Israel keep their latrines outside the camp,
with the picture that God walks through the camp,
and you wouldn’t want God seeing anything unclean in the camp!)

Since 99% of a man’s seed will fail to take root,
it’s now a “waste product” and so renders whatever it touches unclean!

Further, if your wife is a picture of the holy place –
then remember that the holy place is not a place where *anyone* can remain indefinitely!

The high priest had to go through a lengthy purification process in order to enter...
(oh, by the way – that’s Leviticus 16 – what we’ll be looking at *next week!*)

So we should not at all be surprised to find that entering your wife’s “holy place”
also requires purification!

Because unlike the priest – who is entirely given over to his holy function –
your “priest” is not.

You can see clearly in verse 18 that the reason why they both become unclean
is because of the *man*.

It’s a simple question of physiology.
The woman is functioning properly.
The man is not.

The male organ has a double purpose.
It is used for the production of life – but also for the production of waste.

And you’re going to bring that thing into my holy place?!

If humanity is going to enter the presence of God,
we must be clean.

And so the act of reproducing the image of God is portrayed as having connection to this!

This is why God will so regularly describe idolatry as adultery.

And this is also why scripture will talk about how “the violation of women is tantamount to the violation of sacred space” –
and calls forth the holy wrath of Israel’s God! (Garcia)

So now think for a moment of what this means.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary
without male semen.

Only a man could repair man’s fault.

But there was no man who could fix what man had broken...

And so God himself had to come in our form!

Likewise, when Christ unites his holy Bride to himself,
he *cleanses us* by water and the word –
that we might be a holy and radiant Bride!

He makes clean, he protects, he nurtures.

And Paul says that this is the pattern for husbands!

You are called to love your wife as Christ loved the church!

b. Ordinary Female Menstruation (v19-24)

¹⁹ “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.

²⁰ And everything on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean. Everything also on which she sits shall be unclean. ²¹ And whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. ²² And whoever touches anything on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.

²³ Whether it is the bed or anything on which she sits, when he touches it he shall be unclean until the evening. ²⁴ 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.

Likewise, the woman in verses 19-30 may be rendered unclean through improper function.

The sequence here, however is reversed.

First we deal with the normal, then we move to the abnormal –
providing something of a chiasmic structure to the chapter.

Verses 19-24 speak of the normal menstrual cycle.

How can this be said to be “improper function”?

Doesn’t a woman have her period every month?

Think about what is happening.

For the man, if the seed falls anywhere but his wife,
it renders him unclean.

What is the purpose of her flow?

It signals the fact that she is not pregnant.
It means that the unfertilized egg is passing from her body.
Therefore she will be unclean for seven days,
and any man who lies with her will also be unclean seven days.
The stain of impurity is contagious.

If woman is a picture of the holy place –
then her monthly cycle embodies the condition of God’s people.

When she is “properly functioning” she is clean and ready for approach.
Menstruation is part of the normal pattern – but it reflects the “not yet” of redemption.
When a woman is menstruating, it is clear that *now* is not the time...
But menstruation is only for seven days.
(This reminds us that it is less about actual bleeding
and more about the picture that God is showing us here!)

Mark Garcia says it well:

“What transpires in her physiology is a microcosm of the biblical accounts of the creation and flood, as well as of the glorious temple itself. And this...informs and in some cases directly shapes the biblical legislation regarding the urgency of proper protection of, care, and love of a woman. It also, in its variety of biblical reverse images, identifies the tragic and dark forms of the failure to properly do so.”

3. Irregular Female Discharges (v25-30)

a. The Uncleanness of the Woman with a Discharge (v25-27)

²⁵ *“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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ And whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.*

But then in verses 25-30 we hear of abnormal discharges in women.
Like the man, this is not an ordinary uncleanness.
This one requires an eighth day sacrifice in order to be restored –
again pointing to the new creation!

Like with men, it is worth pointing out that the only sort of discharge that renders unclean is one of a sexual nature.

The focus is on the reproductive system.

A woman whose reproductive system flows forever could flood the world
(there are actually ancient myths about that...)

Moses is helping us understand the truth behind that.

After all, if *all* women had dysfunctional wombs – humanity would cease to exist!

But it's worth pointing out that the way that Moses talks about this has nothing to do with marriage or child-bearing (we heard about child-bearing back in chapter 12).

Moses deals with menstruation and discharges separately.
Why?

Because his point here in chapter 15 has to do with *male* and *female*.
You may have noticed in verse 18 that there was no reference to what kind of sexual union he was describing (it's just as true for adulterous relations as for marital relations!).

I probably do need to point out that sexual union can only happen between male and female.
The parts required for sexual union only come in male and female.

Two can only become one flesh through male and female.

But verse 18 applies to any sexual relation between male and female.

The reason for this is again because Moses is dealing with sexual physiology and its relation to the next chapter –
how the High Priest can enter the Most Holy Place!

A woman's body is a picture of the Most Holy Place
whether or not she ever has sexual relations in her life.

And so when a woman's reproductive system malfunctions,
it is a picture of the catastrophic result of the Most Holy Place being inaccessible!

This is why she also requires cleansing after systemic malfunctions.

b. The Eighth Day Cleansing of the Woman with a Discharge (v28-30)

²⁸ *But if she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean.* ²⁹ *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.* ³⁰ *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.*

Perhaps now you can appreciate the trials of that poor woman
who had suffered with a discharge of blood for 12 years! (Mark 5:25-34)

For 12 years she was unclean.

For 12 years, everything she touched became unclean!

And then she heard about Jesus – and she said,

“If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.”

And when Jesus perceived that power had gone out from him,
he asked, “who touched me?”

“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”

Again – the uncleanness does not contaminate Jesus!

Rather, his holiness decontaminates whatever he touches –
and even whatever touches him!

The one who was born of a Virgin heals the 12 year flow of blood!

Of course, the rest of Mark 5 is about how Jesus raised a 12 year old girl from the dead.

4. The Danger: “Defiling My Tabernacle” (v31-33)

³¹ “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.”

³² This is the law for him who has a discharge and for him who has an emission of semen, becoming unclean thereby; ³³ 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.

There is a closing admonition to the priests in chapter 15,
encouraging them to teach these things

–keeping the Israelites separate from that which would defile – not just them –
but the tabernacle!

God’s point is that *their uncleanness* has the potential to defile the tabernacle –
which would result in the tabernacle being removed –
in which case they would die –
and no one would ever come into the presence of God ever again!!!

Obviously this is why there are certain discontinuities between Moses and Christ!

Christ has opened the way into the heavenly Holy of Holies –
a truly Most Holy Place that *can never be defiled*.

So in one sense, Leviticus 15 has no direct application to the church.
I would be hard pressed to identify a single sentence

that I would urge you to take absolutely literally and put into practice “as is.”

And yet...

The imagery is stunning.

And the implications are profound!!

Once you’ve got this solid in your head,
you will never make love to your wife the same way again...

and you probably won’t even *think* of suggesting it when she’s menstruating!

So much that passes for sexual relations in our day is all about power and pleasure –
and so little about entering the holy place.

Both the patriarchalist and the homosexualist movements have butchered this.

As Mark Garcia says:

If the Scriptures revel and [exult] in these ways regarding the significance of what makes a woman different from a man, and vice versa, then the tragedy of the homosexualist agenda and of family or ecclesiastical maltreatment of women is clearer. In the homosexualist agenda, the push for a *distortion of equality* as uniformity, of practical undifferentiated sexuality, of sexuality as mere cultural more, we lose what makes us meaningful. We lose, too, what makes a woman uniquely special. The homosexuality agenda is thus a great oppression of women. In family or ecclesiastical maltreatment of women [the patriarchalist approach], the urgency of the biblical proscriptions is lost on us if we ignore the motif of the feminine as a kind of sacred space which is violated in the failure to protect, nurture, provide for, and love - a violation which, in marital form, can be so severe that it ruptures the one-flesh reality.

Both errors result in defiling the tabernacle –

which Jesus says will result in him coming to remove that church’s lampstand.