

Leprosy: Outbreak of Sin; The Cleansing of the Leper

Peace and Communion · Leviticus 13–14

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He is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be (Lev. 13:46).

The hindrances to communion which we have been gathering from Scripture thus far, have been defilements contracted from without, by the influence of unclean things, or dead things. We have gone over several varieties, but they have all been from what is outside us; for the cleansing of which, God graciously made provision according to the nature of the cases, and suited to His presence who was dwelling among them. Thus a man who touched a dead dog, or even the carcase of a clean animal, or creeping thing, was unclean only till even, and needed only to wash his clothes; whereas, the man who touched a bone of a man (Num. 19:16)

was unclean for no less than seven days, and it necessitated his having the water of purification sprinkled upon him, both on the third day and on the seventh day. Moreover, on the seventh day it is said he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even (Lev. 11:28; Num. 19:19).

Now why this difference? Because by man came sin, and death by sin. To touch a dead body, or a bone of a man, therefore, is being brought into contact with death, which came by man's sin. It consequently needed that the ashes of an heifer {Heb. 9:13},

typical of Christ's sacrifice, should be applied by the water of separation {Num. 19:13, 20, 21}

to the man, before he could possibly be clean. And this is why it is also said, if he does not purify himself, he would be cut off {Num. 19:13, 20}.

How terrible to be "cut off" by God. How impossible it is for Spirit-taught souls not to see the divine stamp on these wondrous Scriptures! Besides our getting defiled by the influence of things without, there is the uncleanness which arises from within, and is of a far more serious character. Leprosy sets this forth. Two long chapters are devoted to it. It is looked at most gravely from different points of view; but wherever it was found, it imperatively called for immediate excision, as wholly insufferable in the place where God was dwelling. Ah, could we, as God's children, but have the abiding consciousness of his dwelling in us, and that the church is His habitation, with what holy fear and trembling should we speak and act! In all of these instances of uncleanness washing was indispensable for cleansing; washing thus typifying the washing of water by the Word. In some cases, particularly those connected with man in death, if only a touch of a bone of a man, it required the sprinkling of the ashes of the slain heifer to purify them, so as to restore such to God's presence. In

cases of leprosy, however, whether in a man or in a house, it needed that the full typical value of the death and blood-shedding of the sacrifice,

and that which set forth the resurrection of the Lord, as well as a personal sense of the value of the blood, and the anointing oil, should be known, and the whole case judged and dealt with in the presence of the Lord, before the one who had been defiled with leprosy could be fully restored. How blessed to trace these wondrous ways of God in restoring such as have become unclean! and how the instances we have considered admonish us to be watchful, not only as to what we have communion with, but even what we “touch!” Leprosy is a loathsome disease. It is set before us in Scripture as an illustration of the workings of fleshly lusts; for it is deeper than the skin {Lev. 13:3}.

Like sin, its ravages are frightful; and it shows how unfit for communion, or the place of God’s presence, those are in such uncleanness. In this way the instructions concerning leprosy become illustrative of that which affects “fellowship.” Leprosy has been described by a popular writer as “a loathsome and infectious disease, still prevalent throughout all Syria, and corresponding in its general characteristics with that of former ages. It is called distinctively by some people, “The stroke or wound of the Lord.” It commences internally, and often lies concealed for years, or is secretly spreading, before there is any outward indication of it; and after it breaks out, the sufferer often lingers for years before it reaches a crisis, and then years sometimes elapse before the leper is released by death. The bones and the marrow are pervaded with the disease, so that the joints of the hands and feet lose their power, the limbs of the body fall together, and the whole system assumes a most deformed and loathsome appearance.” (Pop. Cyclop.) Mungo Park says: “It appears at the beginning in scurfy spots . . . at length, the ends of the fingers swell and ulcerate . . . the nails drop off, and the bones of the fingers become carious, and separate at the joints. In this manner the disease continues to spread, frequently until the patient loses all his fingers and toes. Even the hands and feet are sometimes destroyed by this inveterate malady.” It was because God was dwelling among a people on earth, whom He had chosen, and redeemed out of Egypt to Himself, that He would have them discern, and put a difference between clean and unclean, and be practically suited to His own presence. Leprosy was the most serious state in which an Israelite could be found; for until he was pronounced clean, and had cleansed himself, and offered certain offerings, he could never be fully restored. According to the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Leviticus, leprosy might be personal, affecting only an individual; or it might be in a garment {Lev. 13:59},

affecting his personal surroundings and associations; or it

might be in a house {Lev. 14:34},

the place where several are located, which might possibly necessitate its being pulled down, and carried out of the city into an unclean place. Leprosy serves to illustrate either bad doctrine, concerning which it is said, A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (Gal. 5:9);

or immoral practice, about which it is said, A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6).

Scripture is most decided in dealing with evil doctrine. Of those who were undermining the truth of justification by faith, the apostle says, I would they were even cut off which trouble you (Gal. 5:12).

Another apostle charges an elect lady and her children {2 John 1},

not to receive into her house, or even to salute, one who did not bring the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9, 10).

As to personal leprosy, a spot or swelling of some kind appears on the surface of the body. The question is, What is it? The God-fearing in Israel would be under considerable exercise of mind as to the real nature of the unpleasantness, because God in His word had given most solemn and decided instructions about such things. So now, looking at its spiritual significance, an unusual spot appears in a person's walk, or testimony. It is not surmise, not thinking or imagining evil against a brother, for that would be evil in God's sight; but it is a fact, that the spot has appeared. It is so manifest that the only question is, What is it? The spot or swelling having appeared, is it a temporary swelling, or red spot, like the case of one overtaken in a fault? or is there such active working of fleshly evil, so dishonoring to God, that the person must be pronounced unclean, and put away? The whole question in Israel was, Is it leprosy? not how much, or how little; for if only a spot of leprosy, he is unclean. The command of God was, if a man be a leper, he must go outside the camp, for he is unclean. He must put a covering upon his upper lip, and with his clothes rent, and his head bare, cry, Unclean, unclean. All the days wherein the plague shall be in him, he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be (Lev. 13:45, 46).

Then it is important to observe that a priest, either Aaron or one of his sons, was the only person in Israel competent to discern and pronounce a true judgment of clean or unclean in such cases. When there was any appearance of leprosy, the man was brought to the priest. This shows us that Christ should at once be our refuge until the case is clearly made manifest;

and it also teaches us, as we have said before, that one who is a priest is alone able to discern the real character of such matters. The case must be unmistakably proved to be leprosy before discipline could take place. When this was made sure, then the children of Israel were to put out of the camp every leper (Num. 5:2, 3). This was absolute and compulsory. No favor or affection was to be showed to anyone. The dearest friend or relative must be put out, if he is affected. But this solemn acting was not to be from suspicion, however strong the grounds for it might be. The case must first be clearly manifested. If there were the least question about it, the priest was to shut the man up for seven days, and then look at him again the seventh day; if he is not then satisfied, he might shut him up for seven days more {Lev. 13:5},

and the priest shall look on him again the seventh day, when he might expect the case to be made so clear as to be able to pronounce him clean or unclean. We find this principle of declining to act before sufficient and unquestionable evidence has been forthcoming, running through Scripture. On another matter we read: Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and behold if it be truth, and the thing certain (Deut. 13:14).

We read also, both in the Old and New Testaments, the importance of having the assured testimony of two or three witnesses (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1). It need scarcely be added how important this principle of action is in dealing with cases in connection with the discipline of God's assembly. While diligent investigation and prayer to God to make manifest are to be commended, nothing can excuse haste in acting before the evil is most certainly made clear, rendering the person unfit for the assembly of God, until he shall be clean. It was a priest only, as we have observed, who could discern such cases; and why? Because he was consecrated; the blood and anointing oil were upon him; and he was called and set apart for the service of the sanctuary. This, in a higher sense, every Christian is now; but every Christian is not consciously so; for some do not live on priestly food, nor do they take the place of priestly service, to which, through grace, they are entitled. And, further, as even Aaron and his sons would be unable to discern between clean and unclean, if they drank wine or strong drink, and would die if they washed not their hands and feet when they went into the service of the sanctuary, or came near the altar to minister; so now a Christian, if gratifying fleshly lusts which war against the soul, instead of abstaining from them, will not be spiritual, nor able to discern between holy and unholy. The spiritual not only acknowledge constantly that in them (that is, in their flesh), dwelleth no good thing, but are more exercised about their own souls being in communion with the Lord than anything else. As the priests had to feed on those things, wherewith the atonement was made to sanctify and to consecrate them (Ex. 29:33),

so those only are competent to discern between clean and unclean, according to God, who really know the Lord as their Life-sustainer as well as their Life-giver. Such can truly say, The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me {Gal. 2:20}. He that is spiritual judgeth [discerneth] all things (1 Cor. 2:15);

and it is the "spiritual," (not Christians, who, like the Corinthians, the apostle could only speak of as "carnal"), whom the Holy Ghost would use to restore such among us as have got wrong. When the apostle was addressing those who had through false teachers got into a carnal state, he says, Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

For believers to be truly in the exercise of their priestly functions, they must know assuredly, like Aaron and his sons, that they have been chosen and called of God, and that they have been consecrated to the service of the sanctuary. Such know they have been washed with the water of the Word; they know that all their sins have been righteously judged, and put away by Jesus as their sin-offering; they know, too, that they are accepted in the Beloved, in all the sweet savor of Jesus as their burnt-offering; they have realized in their own souls what it is to be cleansed and set apart to God by the blood of Jesus, and to have the Holy Ghost dwelling in them. They know liberty to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, in rest and peace, and for communion and worship. And, in a far higher sense than priests of old, they have all-sufficient direction from God, in His holy word, for every question of clean and unclean that can possibly come before them. And should perplexities arise, and they wait on and for God patiently, He will assuredly make everything needful manifest. Cases may appear at first sight

to be leprous which are afterward clearly seen not to be so; and cases of apparently trivial importance at first, become afterward confirmed as leprosy. We know who alone is sufficient for these things. Now let us look at some of these cases. We read, The Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying, When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising (swelling), a scab, or bright spot, and it be in the skin of his flesh like the plague of leprosy, then he shall be brought unto Aaron the priest, or unto one of his sons the priests (Lev. 13:1, 2).

A man, then, has a swelling in the skin of his flesh (Lev. 13:2); it is not mere suspicion, but it is a fact. There the swelling is, and it is for the priest, with God's directions in his hands, and the anointing oil upon him, to pronounce upon it. His sphere is limited to Israel; those among whom God dwelt. He had no instructions for cases among Gentiles; and so we have to judge them that are within; God judgeth them that are without. The apostle speaks of "swellings" in a spiritual sense; of some who were puffed up {1 Cor. 4:18, 5:2},

and of others who were vainly puffed up in their fleshly mind {see Col. 2:18}.

Such things are sometimes seen. Self-love, self-exaltation, are at work. A person, hitherto in health of soul, becomes selfinflated, perhaps at some view he may have of a certain Scripture. He speaks of it to others. His vanity about the discovery which he imagines he has made becomes manifest. However, after a little patience, and waiting on God in prayer for him, it soon subsides. It is not heresy, but a temporary rising of self-confident thoughts, and it has disappeared. It was not leprosy; he is clean. Or it may be he is so puffed up,

like some at Corinth, as to exalt himself and look down upon others, because he had not committed the same flagrant sin as another. He ought rather to have "mourned." The word is brought to bear upon his conscience, and it disappears. It is only a rising, or swelling. Take another case. A scab (Lev. 13:2)

appears on one in fellowship. He has been long sitting with others at the Lord's table, gathered to the name of Him who said, There am I in the midst of them {Matt. 18:20}.

The scab has such an unclean appearance that those who are spiritual are much exercised before the Lord about it. But what is it? It looks like leprosy, and if it be so, the person must be put out. But is it really leprosy? They bring him before the priest (the Lord), and wait on Him to make the matter clearly manifest. It is one who states what at first looks like unsound doctrine, and seems to favor laxity; but, after careful investigation, it is found that the brother only advanced something he had read in some book, without considering its serious importance; so that when he found the spiritual were seriously examining the scab, he was soon recovered. It was not leprosy. He is clean, though the scab be not yet healed. Or, another has been walking in ways apparently very unclean. He was seen in an idol's temple, where there is worship to demons. He was seen eating fruit there which had been offered to an idol. He says, having seen another, whom he knew to be a decided Christian, come out from the temple, he went in on that account; and, till it was pointed out to him, he did not see the dreadful wickedness the act appeared to involve. Thus he fell through the bad example of another. It is not leprosy. He is not to be so treated as unclean. Look at another instance. A bright spot (Lev. 13:2)

is seen on one who has hitherto been blameless. It is only one "spot," but "bright" and distinct. He is excited about one point of doctrine of comparatively small moment. He has left the great truths and broad lines of Scripture concerning Christ, (always a sign of declension), and is quite excited about this one point. We once met with a Christian man, who earnestly

contended that Scripture made an important distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Holy Ghost; and he did not seem willing to be convinced that in the original they were the same word. In another place, a preacher in one of the sects warmly contended with us that there was a great difference in Scripture between "eternal" and "everlasting." He would not easily yield to the fact that in the original they were the same word. These were spots -- the garment spotted by the flesh -- but not leprosy. They were not unclean so as to be put outside the camp. It may be that the "bright spot" has disappeared from each of them long ago. Or there may be a "bright spot" of moral delinquency. A brother expressed himself warmly and excitedly on a certain occasion; he had used too strong and unbecoming language; but on examination it was found to have been based on a misunderstanding, and when investigated, the matter was soon cleared up. It was not leprosy -- not the leaven of malice and wickedness. Another case was that of a boil, in the skin of the flesh, a more serious thing than a spot, or a scab, or a mere swelling (Lev. 13:23). It is a work of time for a boil to go through its various stages, and at the end to prove itself to be only a foul and corrupt thing. To give examples of what seems to us to be its spiritual significance, a man exposes himself to the atmosphere of false doctrine, and not knowing his own proclivities, and the danger of such a position, he becomes somewhat infected by the poison before he is aware of it. He tries to convince himself and others that there is some truth, as he says, in the false doctrine; for he is ignorant of Satan's craft to mix a little truth with error so as to deceive, and forgets the divinely-written sentence that no lie is of the truth {1 John 2:21}.

He thinks much over the subject, talks about it, writes to his friends respecting it, becomes increasingly excited on the point, and pained also at the lack of sympathy and even attention of others; but at last, by turning to God and His word only, in dependence on His Spirit, the real state of this spiritual disorder is manifest, the corruption is exposed, the boil discharges itself of its foul contents, and it ceases to be. He had not fully embraced the leprous doctrine, and he is now most thankful for his escape from the snare. Or, a person exposes himself to the tainting influence of an immoral association. He knows little of himself. He thinks, because he desires to walk uprightly as a child of God, that he is proof against such contagion. This is a serious mistake, as many have had painfully to prove! for evil communications corrupt good manners {1 Cor. 15:33}.

The best may be damaged by evil associations. May we take heed to this, and watch with self-distrust, and faith in God! Where this is not the case, the corrupting influence may so work in us as to culminate in a boil, giving pain and distress, as well as drawing out from us such corruption, as self-examination can detect, and from which self-judgment and faith only can deliver us. How true it is that, he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption {Gal. 6:8}.

A scall (Lev. 13:29-34)

in the head, or beard, would require careful inspection to distinguish it from leprosy. The hair, setting forth our comeliness, might hide it from view. So the comely and attractive features and behavior of some, their amiable and winning ways, at times effectually hide the leaven they carry with them. It is well to be aware of this. We must never forget that leaven may hide itself under the most comely exterior. Then there may be white bright spots (Lev. 13:38, 39)

manifesting nothing active, which are defects and weaknesses, and not leprosy. It is a freckled spot that groweth in the skin; he is clean (Lev. 13:39).

There may also be a bald spot -- a bald head, or bald forehead (Lev. 13:40, 41). It is a lack of ordinary strength, and of natural comeliness manifested by one in Israel, yet is he clean. This strikingly shows us that God looks for comely ways -courteous and compassionate behavior; and that rudeness in word or action is like manifesting a bald spot. But whether it be a red spot or a scab, a swelling or a boil, a scall or a bald spot, it is possible that leprosy may spring up in either of them; so that if we are unguarded, and begin to give way to the indulgences and weaknesses of the flesh, or the desires of the mind, it may easily go on to such wilful activities as call for the most serious dealing that God can exercise toward man on earth. Even in a bald spot leprosy may spring up. May we be watchful and prayerful, looking off unto Jesus, who is able to keep us from falling! On account of the variety of maladies, which, without careful discernment, might possibly be confounded with leprosy, God graciously gave these many details so as to enable the priest to distinguish between clean and unclean; and, as we have seen, they read to us many instructive lessons, and, among others, the need of patient investigation, and sure guidance, before arriving at a conclusion in such solemn matters. One thing is clear, that leprosy, when once manifested, must be imperatively and uncompromisingly dealt with, and on no account be tolerated in the place where God is pleased to dwell. Leprosy in its nature stands alone. It is characterized by three things. It destroys, it defiles, and it spreads. Most carefully and diligently would the priest look to see if the plague in sight be deeper than the skin (Lev. 13:3);

if so, it showed that there was a destructive process going on, that tissue had actually been consumed, that there was a deep hidden evil at work. It thus sets forth the hidden activities of sin. The workings of fleshly lusts war against the soul; and they destroy everything sacred, and Christlike, which comes under their influence. We are told, If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another {Gal. 5:15}. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died {Rom. 14:15}.

1. We are warned against

3. Leprosy is spreading. Even

foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition {1 Tim. 6:9}. Evil communications corrupt good manners {1 Cor. 15:33}. If any man defile (destroy) the temple of God, him shall God destroy {1 Cor. 3:17}. One sinner destroyeth much good {Eccl. 9:18}.

The wilful activities of fleshly lusts, either of the mind, which come out in evil doctrine, or, through the members of the body, in evil ways, contrary to the revealed will of God, lie deeper than the surface, and war against the soul, thus eating out as doth a canker {2 Tim. 2:17}

all spiritual comfort, godly purpose, and energy. With some who thus walk, it isto be feared that their end is destruction {Phil. 3:19}.

2. Leprosy is defiling. The priest therefore gave deep and solemn attention to discover if the hair in the plague had turned white {see Lev. 13:20, 25};

that is, if it had been spoiled of its natural comeliness, and become defiled. Most persons know that sin is debasing. If those who have been refined addict themselves to sinful habits, how soon they lose even their natural comeliness and beauty, and become degraded! The activities of fleshly lusts soon turn the affections into an impure direction, and defile the mind and conscience. If false doctrine be the current of fleshly energy, the mind becomes dull and darkened, and the conscience bad towards God. If immoral walk be its line, then the mind and heart become occupied with the objects of lust, and thus get away from God. Whether it be bad doctrine, or bad practice (and they are often found together), it always defiles its victims. May we be kept abiding in our Lord Jesus, that, walking in the Spirit, we may not fulfil the lusts of the flesh!

a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump {Gal. 5:9}.

Some may be ready to say, that, because they cannot see its ravages it does not spread; but the character of leaven is that it works quietly and unobservedly, but most surely. The word of God assures us that leaven, even a little, leaveneth. The priest therefore carefully watched to see if the plague spread; and if it did, that would sometimes be sufficient evidence to decide the case. This would be a true sign of leprosy, whether in a man, a garment, or a house (Lev. 13:8, 57; 14:39). If, however, the leprosy cover the man all over, have covered all his flesh, then it would show that the malady had fully spent itself, and though its effects were still manifest, yet it is all turned white, so that the priest would pronounce him clean. If a leprosy break out abroad in the skin, and the leprosy cover all the skin of him that hath the plague from his head even to his foot, wheresoever the priest looketh; then the priest shall consider: and, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague: it is all turned white: he is clean (Lev. 13:12, 13).

But when a person is pronounced to be a leprous man, he must be put outside the camp; and then his cry will be, Unclean, unclean {Lev. 13:45}!

May He, who only is able to keep us from falling, preserve us from all evil, and from every association dishonoring to His name! What need has each to cry to our Lord Jesus, Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe {Psa. 119:117}? “Leave, oh, leave me not alone! Still support and comfort me; All my trust on Thee is stay’d, All my help from Thee I bring; Cover my defenseless head With the shadow of Thy wing.”

-- Restoration He shall be clean (Lev. 14:20).

God only could cure the leper. When he was thus healed, he had to be pronounced clean by the priest, and also to cleanse himself in a way suited to divine holiness. The man that is to be cleansed could only be restored to the privileges of the people of Israel in the way marked out in holy Scripture. We have seen that the greatest care was manifested, and the most diligent and clear investigation made, before a man was pronounced unclean, and put outside the camp. We shall also find that there was no less diligence and care bestowed in restoring him, so that the man himself might be happy, and that

no doubt should remain in the minds of any as to his being clean, and entitled again to all the blessings and advantages of God's favored people. The man, too, would know that he had step by step gone over the whole question of his personal uncleanness, and had bowed submissively to the will of God as to the way of his restoration. Sin is no trifle. Those who have walked according to fleshly lusts, so as to necessitate the severe discipline of being put away {1 Cor. 5:13},

ought solemnly to feel the dreadful character of sin and

uncleanness in the sight of God; and such, under divine teaching, will find relief in confessing to God, and acknowledging to others, that their own judgment of themselves, and of their ways, has been according to the truth. He that doeth truth cometh to the light {John 3:21}.

To the heathen it would appear foolish and needless to be offering sacrifices, washing, cutting off the hair, &c., before he could be properly restored to the camp of Israel; and why? Because such have no sense of its being the place of God's presence. And so now, those who have no true idea of God's people being the habitation of God through the Spirit {Eph. 2:22},

cannot enter into the deep exercises of soul, and long continued process of sorrow and humiliation, which many who have been put away {1 Cor. 5:13}

are called to pass through, before the hand of those who are spiritual can be cordially stretched out to welcome them back. We have long been persuaded that some have much to learn on this subject of great practical moment; and may then discover why so many of those who have been brought back to the Lord's table have turned out so unsatisfactorily. The long experience of humiliation and sorrow which the remnant of Jews will yet have to pass through, before, like Thomas, they will be able to look upon the face of Jesus, and say, My Lord and my God {John 20:28},

is another remarkable illustration that with God sin is a most serious matter. The book of Psalms, and the testimony of other prophets, plainly teach this. The tried remnant will find out that they were rightly put outside the camp, for the dreadful leprosy manifested in hating Jesus without a cause; and they will then thankfully bow to the will of God as to every step of His discipline, even in going through the great tribulation. They will afterward look on Him whom they pierced, and wail because of Him, before they are restored to their own land, and enjoy the promised peace and blessing under Messiah's rule, when every man shall sit under His own vine and fig tree, and the true David shall reign before His ancients gloriously {in glory, Isa. 24:23}.

It is in the remnant of Israel, now leprous, and by-and-by to be pronounced clean, that this ordinance will have its complete fulfilment. In the cleansing of the leper, he is first set before us as conscious, that, by the power of God, the foul and spreading disease has been healed, and he is standing before the priest, in order that he may be pronounced clean by him. He realizes that his discerning eye views him all over. And is it not the first point in the history of a restored soul, that the plague of sin is stopped, that he has ceased to do evil? He may be like a man white all over the skin of his flesh, the wilful activities of fleshly lusts having all come out; but they are past, the plague of leprosy is stayed. Then must we not think of such an one, that the next step in soul-restoration must bring him before our precious Lord Jesus, to be searched and known thoroughly by Him who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification?

And what will he learn when consciously before Him? What can one in such a state of soul learn, but that Christ loved him, and gave Himself for him? This he apprehends now in a deeper and truer way than he ever knew before. The man is before the Priest. He sees the two birds alive and clean brought out. His eye rests upon the earthen vessel and running water. He stands still. He beholds with intense interest all that passes. He looks at every movement of the priest. He sees one of the clean birds, that had just before been soaring on wing of flight toward heaven, now cruelly put to death, and its blood shed. He notices that it was killed in an earthen vessel, over running water. What does all this mean? The priest is thus setting forth the foundation truth of the gospel, that God's only way of atonement for sin is by the death of Another; and as this bird was killed in an earthen vessel over running water, so did Jesus, who died for our sins, offer Himself, by the Eternal Spirit, without spot to God {Heb. 9:14},

to purge our consciences by His own blood. There stood the man looking fixedly on the dead bird and its shed blood, and knew that it was all for himself. Still he stands motionless before the priest. He next saw the priest take up the living bird, and a piece of cedar wood, a little scarlet, and a bunch of hyssop, and dip them in the blood of the dead bird. The priest then sprinkled him thus with the blood seven times, and pronounced him clean. Nor is this all; for the living bird (marked with the blood of the dead bird) flew away, while the man was thus pronounced clean. Now nothing, as it seems to us, could possibly portray the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus with greater simplicity, and clearness, than this ordinance; and it is here set forth because every restored soul has to learn afresh, as it were, what Jesus did for him, when He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. He has to grasp the precious fact, that all our blessings are founded on this work. Two birds are used, because one creature could not illustrate both the death and resurrection of our precious Savior. But the living one is so identified with the dead bird by being dipped in its blood, that, when it was let loose in the open field, it flew away marked with the blood of the dead bird; thus strikingly reminding us of Him who entered into heaven itself by His own blood. The cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop also set forth His personal excellencies of incorruptibility, royalty, and lowliness. Thus we behold the infinite perfections of Him who said, almost under the shadow of the cross, Now, O Father, glorify thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was (John 17:5).

In this way, the man, who had been put out of the camp for leprosy, had to learn more thoroughly than he had ever done before, that all remission, cleansing, and title to be in the presence of God, is founded on the one sacrifice for sins. It is here a fresh sacrifice, because in the economy of the law there were many sacrifices, and therefore there was a remembrance of sins instead of remission, no sacrifice being more than of twelve months' efficacy; but with us there, is but one sacrifice

for sins, and only once offered, because by it we are perfected for ever, and our sins are remembered no more. The instruction is not to us now, as is improperly said, "a fresh sprinkling of the blood"; but while the person is consciously a returning one to the assembly, such learn from the Lord, by His holy Word and Spirit, in this time of deep exercise of conscience, the everlasting value of His death and bloodshedding as cleansing from all sin, and His resurrection justifying us from all things, as well as giving us, by Him, who is gone into heaven itself by His own blood, liberty and title to be there. This we judge is the divinely-taught lesson that all learn, who are really restored to fellowship according to the teaching of the Spirit of God. Not that he did not know the preciousness of the blood before, but he now learns from the Lord, in His own presence, its purification of his conscience, and justification from all things in a deeply solemn way; for He only can pronounce him clean

It is easy to put people away from the fellowship of the Lord's table {1 Cor. 10:21};

but the question is, Has it been done according to the Lord's mind? If so, He will confirm the act of discipline; and how very solemn this is! Whatsoever ye

(two or three gathered together in My name) shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 18:18-20).

It is easy also to bring persons back to the Lord's table; but the question is, Have they ceased to do evil? Do they judge that, by the power of God, they have received healing? Have they learned of the Lord, and in His presence, what He did for them by His death and resurrection? and have they on this ground been pronounced clean by Him? But if so, he is not restored yet; for the next words which follow are, And he that is to be cleansed {Lev. 14:8}.

Though pronounced clean, he has now to cleanse himself. Such have to observe the word, Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1).

This is indeed a very solemn ordeal, but a point of great importance, and never to be overlooked. And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days (Lev. 14:8).

After having thus cleansed himself, he might go into the camp; but he must keep out of his tent for seven days. He has thus gained a step in the way of restoration, though not yet restored; and this is important to keep in remembrance. No doubt this sets before us a further step in soul-restoration for communion, though, as we have said, he is not restored. To us we judge the washing of his clothes and himself in water is putting ourselves, and our personal surroundings, under the searching,

cleansing power of the word of God -the washing of water by the Word {Eph. 5:26}.

And what exercise of soul, what thorough self-examination, what searching investigation of our near surroundings and circumstances, and unsparing self-judgment, does this involve! But how can a soul that has been letting out the sinful workings of the flesh to the Lord's open dishonor be restored in any other way? How else could he be really self-judged before God? How could there be, without this, that godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of {see 2 Cor. 7:10}?

Thus every step reminds us that sin is no trifle. But this is not all; for he loathes himself. His comeliness, like Daniel's, in the presence of a certain Man clothed in linen (Dan. 10:5),

is turned in him into corruption. He will not allow he has any comeliness or strength, for he shaves off all his hair, and for seven days walks about the camp, but knows he cannot yet enter into his tent, and there take his place as heretofore as if nothing had happened. For a full period this goes on; for seven days and nights he tarries abroad out of his tent, and on the seventh day the process of self-loathing becomes deepened. Like another, he might say, I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes {Job 42:5}.

It is not merely self-examination and self-judgment, but selfabhorrence. Woe is me! for I am undone, I am unclean. It shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head, and his beard, and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off: and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean (Lev. 14:9).

Thus all his comeliness and strength, all natural beauty and energy, are totally disallowed; and both himself and his near associations are again brought under the searching and cleansing power of the Word. The soul taught of God not only hates his sin, but loathes himself. He learns, not only that he has sinned, but that in him (that is, in his flesh), dwelleth no good thing. This is wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost, who would teach us not only that Christ bore our sins, but that we were by nature so undone, unclean, and incurably bad, as to be totally unfit for the presence of God, or to be used in His service; only fit for divine judgment. For seven days the man, though conscious of partial restoration, was exercised as to his full restoration. How every step reminds us of the exceeding sinfulness of sin! What a complete (seven days) time of self-judgment and humiliation this must have been. Let us not fail to observe, that it begins with a deep sense in the soul, learned in the presence of the Lord, the Priest, of the value of His own work for us, when He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification {Rom. 4:25}.

There is no true soul restoration that does not begin from the light and power of the marvelous grace of God to us in Christ. Then he cleanses his surroundings and himself by the Word. But when he abhors himself, he goes down to the root of the matter, traces all the wilfulness and wickedness of the flesh to a corrupt and evil nature. This marked the repentance of David, and this he wrote in a book, so that his confession and self-abasement may be seen to this day in the word of God, and for the glory of God. He not only said, I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me;

{1 Pet. 3:18};

but they perceive that their very trespasses against God were actually judged on the Lord Himself, as our trespass-offering on the cross. While the humbled one is thus gazing on the slain lamb, he cannot but say -“In His spotless soul’s distress I perceive my guiltiness; Oh, how vile my lost estate, Since my ransom was so great!”

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Nor is this all. Having before learnt the cleansing power of the blood of Christ, he has now to learn its sanctifying power. He is to know not only that he is cleansed by that blood, but set apart for God by it; that he is himself sprinkled with the blood of the trespass-offering,

Thus, when he has first judged his sins in their evil fruit, and then traced them to their corrupt and evil source, he cries out,

that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2).

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow (Psa. 51:3-9).

And the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespassoffering, and the priest shall put it upon the tip of the right ear of him that is to be cleansed, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot (Lev. 14:14).

but he added,

In this, too, we doubtless have the repentant utterances of the Jewish remnant by-and-by prophetically recorded, while it marks, in principle, the path of the Spirit in soul-restoration from an evil course. How forcibly do all these Scriptures show that sin is no trifle, as well as teach us what a serious matter it is to have to do with Him about it who is holy and true. But the eighth day arrives. It is the beginning of a new order of things. The man that is to be made clean {Lev. 14:11}

draws nearer still; for, with unblemished lambs, and meatoffering, and a log of oil, he is now presented by the priest at the door of the tabernacle -- the place of having to do with God. One he-lamb is offered for him for a trespass-offering. Thus his sin is confessed, and judged; yea, the lamb is slain in the place where he shall kill the sin-offering and burnt offering. He knows it is for him, and it shows that his sin is forgiven by it, so that in this way he can approach the sanctuary of God. And on the eighth day he shall take two he-lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, and three tenth deals of fine flour for a meatoffering, mingled with oil, and one log of oil. And the priest that maketh him clean shall present the man that is to be made clean, and those things, before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the priest shall take one he-lamb, and offer him for a trespassoffering, and the log of oil, and wave them for a waveoffering before the Lord: and he shall slay the lamb in the place where he shall kill the sin-offering and the burnt offering, in the holy place: for as the sin-offering is the priest’s, so is the trespass-offering: it is most holy {Lev. 14:10-13}.

After the flesh has been broken down, and self-loathing has well occupied the heart, how precious then the work of Jesus becomes to the soul! Not only do such realize the great truth that Christ . . . once

suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust

He is now to be thoroughly alive to the fact that he is consecrated to the service of God; the ear to hearken to His word, the hand to minister in His service, and the foot to walk in His ways. The ear, and thumb, and toe, are also anointed with oil, to still further show the entire consecration to God, which becomes those who are purchased by the blood of Christ, and are anointed by the Holy Ghost. Thus we are not only set apart for God by the blood of Jesus, but anointed and strengthened for His service by the anointing of the Holy Ghost. We can readily perceive what progress there is in all this in restoration to communion. It is well, moreover, to observe that the order in the cleansing of the leper is the same as in the consecration of the priests; firstly, washed with water -- clean through the Word; secondly, sprinkled with blood -cleansed and sanctified; and thirdly, anointed with oil -- the anointing of the Holy Ghost. This is also the order at conversion, and seems to be gone over and learnt in a more thorough way in the restoration of a soul to the enjoyment again of the presence of God. But there is a further point to be noticed here. The remainder of the oil is poured upon the head of him that is to be cleansed on the eighth day. This day is, as we have said, the beginning of a new era. Typically, we are on new-creation ground here. The man who has, under the deep sense of having been leprous, honored God in coming back again to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in His way, in obedience to His own word, is now honored of God. Them that honour me, I will honour {1 Sam. 2:30}

is His truth. The priest had been anointed, the prophet also, and the king; and now the returning one, who had been loathsome and leprous, is to be anointed also. He who had for seven days been loathing himself is now comforted and honored by Jehovah. He who had laid aside all thought of His own comeliness can now say, Thou anointest my head with oil {Psa. 23:5}.

The remnant of the oil that is in the priest's hand, he shall pour upon the head of him that is to be cleansed; and the priest shall make an atonement for him before the Lord (Lev. 14:18; also compare 16:32; 1 Kings 19:16).

Thus the leper in the day of his cleansing has really more honor and blessing than he had before; he is ranked with the prophet, priest, and king of Israel. How truly we prove this to be the way of our God with us! He not only restores, but He honors. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted {Luke 14:11; 18:14}.

How often has His gracious blessing surprised us! How many times, when we have been writing bitter things against ourselves, and thought our conduct so base that He might justly spurn us from His sight, and have been seeking to hide ourselves in the dust, has His own hand been most markedly seen in bringing in fresh blessings, and unthought of honor! How little did Peter think, when the Lord's look had so melted him, and his base conduct had so overpowered him, that he would ever again be honored by the Lord! What a look of faithful love that must have been to have made him weep; yea, weep so bitterly! Oh, how bitterly did it make him weep! How little could he have thought that not many weeks would pass before he would be able, to say, Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over {Psa. 23:5}!

How impossible that any human mind could conjecture that the man, who, in the heat and pride of self-confidence, had boasted of his superior attachment to Jesus, and when tested had denied, even with an oath and a curse, that he knew Him, would have been put by Him in the place of distinguished honor and blessing on the following Pentecost. But in the meantime Peter had been before the Lord. The leprous spots had been under His all-seeing eye. He had keenly felt the indescribable look of Him whom he had so lately offended. What deep exercise of soul it must have given him! He also remembered the word of the Lord {Luke 22:61}.

The angel's message had reached him. He had had a private audience with his risen Lord. What took place at that favoured interview we are not told; but we do read, He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve {1 Cor. 15:5}.

One thing, as a result, is certain, that his desponding soul was begotten again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This he tells us, and for this he blesses God (1 Pet. 1:3). As we have observed, in the cleansing of the leper, all true restoration must begin here. Again we see Peter in this solemn interval gird his fisher's coat unto him, and cast himself into the sea to go to Jesus; for he must be in His presence; he must be near Himself. He was Peter's Priest in the day of his cleansing, as well as his gracious Master. What a Priest! What a Master! Again, Peter saw His mighty power over the fish of the sea; while the fish, and fire, and coals, and the tender utterance, Come and dine {John 21:12},

affected his inmost soul. Nor was this all; for he who had three times denied his Savior, must now, in the presence of his brethren, have the opportunity given him of confessing his true affection for Him. Peter was now so conscious that he was under the scrutiny of His all-piercing eye, and that every secret of his heart, and every turn of his crooked ways, were naked and open before Him, that he at last exclaimed, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee {John 21:17}!

He is then reinstated in service; he is entrusted with the care of His lambs and sheep, though prior to this he was only a fisher of men; and with the sentence of death in himself, he is restored to the privilege of following his gracious Master -Follow thou me (John 21:22).

Thus, whether it be a leper in Israel in the day of his cleansing, or a fallen apostle in the way of his restoration, the principles are the same as to the only way back according to that which suits the presence of God. And it is most blessed to see, that when any have sinned away their privileges on earth, and in faithful discipline are put away from association with God's people, yet, even then, a path is still left open to faith in which they can honor God, and be honored of God. How wonderful is the grace and goodness of God! Happy they who really weigh sin in the sanctuary, in the just balance of divine truth, so as to bring themselves, and their near associations, under the searching and cleansing action of the infallible word of God. To return to our chapter. The man that is to be cleansed is still with the priest; as we saw Peter was much in the Lord's presence. Without this, there cannot possibly be true restoration. The man that is to be cleansed from his uncleanness {Lev. 14:19}

is still with his sacrifices at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation {Lev. 14:11};

for how could he possibly be there without a sacrifice? The sin-offering, burnt-offering, and meat-offering are all offered upon the altar. To us the instruction evidently is, that the only ground of our really being in the presence of God is the atoning work of Christ, and acceptance in Him who is risen and ascended. He now apprehends the precious truth of the righteousness of God. This gives the heart undisturbed repose in His presence. The soul that perceives in the work of Jesus on the cross that God is just, and that His justice has been fully satisfied on account of our sin in that sin-offering, can also see that God is just in justifying him that believeth in Jesus. The sin-offering reminds us, that after Jesus had offered one sacrifice for sins, He sat down for ever, or continuously, on the right hand of God. But, in the burnt-offering, the man is taught that he is accepted in all the acceptability of that sweetsavor offering. With it the meat-offering is also offered, because it sets forth the infinite acceptability of Jesus in life, that blessed and perfect One, who always did those things that pleased the Father, whose meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work. The man is accepted in all

the sweet savour of the burnt-offering; and he is now therefore pronounced clean. Every question as to his leprosy and uncleanness has been fully settled; all has been gone over between himself and Jehovah in the presence of the priest, the evil traced to its origin, and found to rise from a fallen and corrupt nature. Self-examination only led to self-judgment, and then to self-loathing. But on the eighth day -- new creation ground -- he learns, through the sacrifices offered, how righteously God now forgives sin to every one that believeth, and he enters into the divine statute: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness {1 John 1:9}.

He is now clean. As we have said before, we have here also a picture of Israel's present leprous state, and, in Jehovah's governmental displeasure, put away from their privileges as a people, but by-and-by to know full restoration. After they have gone through deep exercise of soul, a nation will be born at once, and forgiven their iniquity; for there shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob {Rom. 11:26}.