

Importance of Purity

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Date: 27 July 2025

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[0 : 00] Why don't we pray before we study the Bible. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word.

! Well, one of the things that I've observed from being a parent is that humans are mirrors. We imitate. My children imitate me all the time. The good and especially the bad, which is a bit concerning. But it makes sense because we're created in the image of God, meaning we're created as mirrors to reflect God's glory as we fellowshiped with him in the Garden of Eden. But we know the story. We got kicked out of Eden because instead of being mirrors of God, humans wanted to be God himself.

But apart from him, apart from God, we still have to reflect something because we're created to be mirrors. And in ourselves, in this broken world, we reflect brokenness.

[1 : 39] Instead of reflecting life from the God of life, we reflect sin and death. And that is the problem that Numbers chapter 5 seeks to manage.

The first four chapters of the book of Numbers, we have gone through the first four chapters, they show us the importance of God's presence in the midst of the Israelites in the wilderness.

And if you remember, the Israelites were encamped surrounding the tabernacle. The tabernacle was at the center of the camp, and that's where God dwelt.

And so, like in the Garden of Eden, God dwelt amongst them again. And as God is holy, then they were called to mirror his holiness. But the problem is, in this broken world, tainted by sin, they couldn't.

They couldn't mirror his holiness perfectly. And thus, God gave them these laws. In this chapter, there are three laws, and each of them deals with the issue of unholiness or moral impurity.

[2 : 59] We've read the first ten verses, but we're going to look at the whole chapter. The first law, from verse 1 to 4, talks about ceremonial defilement.

What is that? Well, in verse 2, three things are mentioned. Defiling skin disease, bodily discharge, and touching a dead body.

As Michelle has demonstrated, from the medical standpoint, these three things were possible contamination. For a group of people traveling together in close quarters in the desert, where, without hospitals around, they would have to be careful not to let sickness kill their entire population.

And so, people who had these things were declared unclean, and were sent away from the camp for a period of time. A quarantine, so to speak. But, this law wasn't just about physical uncleanliness.

Because, in verse 3, God said, these people were to be sent away from the camp because he dwelt there, because God dwelt there. Now, God is not scared of physical defilement, or physical uncleanliness.

[4 : 24] And so, these three things are more than just physical uncleanliness. They're physical symbols for spiritual and moral defilement, or unholiness.

They're the outward signs of what's going on inside. They were reminders of the people's unholiness. Every single time a person with a defiling skin disease, or bodily discharge, or someone who has touched a dead body was sent away from the camp, they were reminded of their spiritual and moral defilement, that they could not mirror God's holiness, that they could not keep themselves clean, both outwardly and, most importantly, inwardly.

These three things could happen to anyone, and so everyone was to be reminded of their spiritual defilement.

They were reminded that even though God dwelt amongst them, that fact was not to be taken for granted. There's a big gap between themselves and God.

God is holy, and unholiness cannot go near Him. On normal days, they could be in the camp, but they could not approach the tabernacle where God was.

[5 : 54] But on the days they had one of these conditions, they were not even allowed to be in the camp. In that circumstance, they would realize that God was so far away from them, unreachd, because God is holy, holy, holy, and they were unholy, unholy, unholy.

They did not mirror God. Now, this law might sound strange and perhaps a bit offensive to us. Why can't the unholy get close to the holy?

Sounds like God is being arrogant here. He's distancing himself from the people. That doesn't sound loving, does it? But actually, the idea of distancing ourselves from moral impurity is not lost to us.

You might have heard about the child care incident a few weeks ago. A male child care educator was charged with sexually assaulting children.

It's a terrible, terrible thing. And so now, some child care centers are trying to distance themselves from the incident.

[7 : 17] If you can't read because it's too small, I'll read it for you. Male child care workers have been turned away from child care centers and had casual shifts canceled.

Now, they're distancing themselves by banning male child care workers. I'm not condoning this response, but it just shows that distancing ourselves from moral impurity is what we also do.

Or you might have seen this video that went viral recently. The CEO of a billion-dollar tech company was caught having an affair with his HR executive at a Coldplay concert.

And everyone tried to distance themselves from the incident. They both had to resign to distance themselves from the company.

And even another woman in the video physically shielded herself from the couple. Distancing ourselves from moral defilement is something that we also do.

[8 : 34] And if we, who are not morally perfect, have the necessity to do that, then how much more it is the case for God, who is morally perfect.

The irony is that as we distance ourselves from the moral impurities around us, we often don't see the moral defilement in ourselves.

that we, too, are unholy. We don't mirror God's holiness. We do things that are defiled. We say things that are defiled.

And, at the very least, we think about things that are defiled. Most of the time, we're just not caught.

If what I'm thinking about was to be broadcasted for the world to see, I would be embarrassed.

It's defiled. This law reminded the Israelites of their spiritual defilement, symbolized by the physical defilement.

[9 : 45] That, as other people saw their physical defilement on the outside, they were reminded that God saw the defilement inside. And they ought to distance themselves from the holy God, the center of the camp.

Holy and unholy cannot mix. Moral purity and moral impurity cannot mix. We and God cannot mix. Because we are defiled on the inside.

But we know what God did. God did the unthinkable in the person of Jesus.

The holy, the morally pure God who's supposed to keep his distance from us, drew near in the person of Jesus to come here to walk and live with us, the defiled.

He came to this world to be with us and to bring us along with him to be with God. But how is that possible? The holy and the unholy can't be near each other.

[10 : 58] How? Because Jesus took our defilement, didn't he? On the cross and died to it so that we get his holiness.

As it says in Hebrews 13, and so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

Jesus stepped out of the camp, so to speak, to take our unholiness, our defilement, so we might become holy in him, to be accepted in the camp, in the people of God, and even accepted in the presence of God.

And so in Jesus, we, the defiled, are declared to be clean and holy. When God sees us in Jesus, he sees clean, pure, holy saints.

So there's no more distance between us and God. So we can say, God is in us, and we in him.
[12:22] How great is that? We'll continue talking about this by reading about the next two laws.

The second law, in verse 5 to 10, talks about doing wrong against another person. So in verse 6 to 7, if someone wronged another person, for example, by stealing things, then that person must confess, repent, and pay restitution, plus 20%.

This law is easier for us to understand because we still kind of do it. We still have laws that require us to pay restitution if we do, if we wrong others.

But the difference is the motive. The motive in today's law of restitution is entirely justice for people, which is not a bad thing. Justice is a good thing.

But the motive in this law is again more than just justice in society. In verse 6, it says that if anyone wrongs another person, they are unfaithful, not to that person, but to the Lord.

[13:46] This is similar to what David says in Psalm 51. To you and you only have I sinned. Now this is way more than justice for people.

Now this doesn't mean that social harm doesn't matter. It does greatly. But it does matter because humans are made in the image of God and therefore wronging humans means dishonoring God's holy honor.

And that's also why in verse 8, when the restitution could not be paid directly to the victim or to their close relatives, it belonged to God.

Because the wrong that was done is honored God's holiness. Again, this was a reminder for the Israelites that they could not possibly be 100% holy or pleasing to God.

They could not mirror God's holiness. They could not please Him 100% using their actions. Every time they wronged someone, they were reminded that they did not just offend the person, they were offending God's holiness.

[15:03] And they were being unfaithful to Him. Now, looking back to ourselves, we too wrong people around us all the time, don't we?

By our actions, by our words, by our thoughts and plans, we fail to mirror God's holiness in the way we deal with others.

We too offend God's holiness. And we ought to pay restitution. I ought to pay restitution. But again, what did God do?

He who was offended came in the person of Jesus and paid restitution for the whole world.

This is what 1 John says, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. We all sin. I sin. I offend God's holiness.

[16:11] We confess our sins. He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin.

But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the only righteous one, the sinless one.

But, last verse, He is the atoning sacrifice, the restitution for our sins, not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.

So, in Jesus, our debts are paid. We are declared forgiven. all our sins, past, present, and future are paid for.

If we take the same steps here, confess our sins, repent, and take Jesus' precious blood to pay for our sins. So, we are no longer cast away from God.

[17:26] We can draw near because of Jesus, and now we are no longer in debt. because Jesus' blood has paid for all the wrongs we have done and will do.

No more restitution. It is finished, Jesus said. That's such an encouragement.

Now, the third law is probably the weirdest one among the three. Let me read some parts of it.

Verse 11, Then the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the Israelites and say to them, If a man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, so that another man has sexual relations with her, and this is hidden from her husband, and her impurity is undetected, since there is no witness against her, and she has not been caught in the act, and if feelings of jealousy come over her husband and he suspects his wife and she is impure, or if he is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure, then he is to take his wife to the priest.

Now, before we continue reading about this law, again, this time, this law is about unholiness, and this time it's about unfaithfulness, and upon first glance, you might find this law a bit unbalanced.

It only applies to wives. What's going on? That's a bit unfair. The previous two laws explicitly state both man and woman.

[19 : 21] Why is this one gender discriminatory? adultery? What if a wife suspects her husband commits adultery? Why doesn't this law talk about that? Well, we need to remember that the ancient world was a male dominated culture, almost everywhere, not just amongst the Hebrews.

Now, this law was given by God, I think, not to give further advantage to the men, but actually to protect the women. You see, the law against adultery had already been given in Leviticus 20. And in that law, both men and women would be punished if they were found to have committed adultery. But this law in Numbers 5 is very specific.

It only applied to one particular circumstance. when a husband suspected that his wife was being unfaithful but could not prove it.

No evidence. And in that circumstance, the wife would need protection. Why? Well, imagine if it's the other way around.

[20 : 37] The wife accuses the husband of adultery. the law already existed, Leviticus 20, and so they both would have to go to a tribal judge.

Remember, there's no king at this point. And the judge would have to look for testimonies. In this case, if the husband did not commit adultery, he would have no problem defending himself. His testimony would have counted, and his public life would have ensured outstanding testimonies from his peers. But if it's the husband accusing the wife of adultery, they both went to a tribal judge, but a woman's testimony did not count during this time.

And a Hebrew woman back then wouldn't have as much social presence as a man. And thus, the public testimonies wouldn't have been in her favor. Worst case scenario, she would have been stoned, by the masses.

This law was given to protect wives from that. God is saying here, if a husband accuses his wife of adultery, but there's no evidence, God will judge directly.

[21 : 55] She was not to be given to a human judge or to the masses. She was to be given to a priest, but the priest did not judge either.

God would judge directly.

What did the priest do then? Well, verse 17, then he shall take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water.

And then verse 19, then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, if no other man has had sexual relations with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you.

But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have made yourself impure by having sexual relations with a man other than your husband, here the priest is to put the woman under this curse.

[23 : 05] May the Lord cause you to become a curse among your people when he makes your womb miscarry and your abdomen swell. Note that the water itself was not poisonous.

It just didn't taste nice. But it's a physical symbol of God's curse. And then last verse, the woman is to say Amen, so be it.

Here God gives the woman to say something, a chance to repent and a chance to consent. Amen, I agree. So be it. So this law was given to protect women in the case of accusation without evidence. What happens to the woman after this? Well, nothing. They just see what happens to the curses and the blessing.

God will judge. marriage. And again, this law was all about unholiness. In this case, it's unholiness in the form of possible impurity in marriage.

[24 : 18] marriage. Every time this law was applied, they would be reminded of the importance of holiness when living with God in their presence.

That they ought to mirror God's holiness in marriage, being faithful 100% of the time in marriage. And yet, who can do that perfectly?

You might think, I can do that. I've been faithful in my marriage. No actual adultery. But didn't Jesus say anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart?

Oh, again, if our minds were to be broadcasted, how many adulteries would be revealed? We might be faithful in our marriages, but in our hearts, how many times have we been unfaithful and therefore unholy?

And if marriage symbolizes the relationship between us and God, how many times have we been unfaithful to God? We should be drinking the bitter cup here and take the curse upon ourselves.

[25 : 46] But what did God do? In the person of Jesus, he took that cup upon himself. Before he went to the cross, didn't Jesus pray, may this cup be taken from me?

referring to the cross as God's cup of wrath? Jesus took the bitter cup reserved for us, so that in Jesus we, who deserved the cup of wrath, can take the cup of forgiveness, symbolized by the Holy Communion.

God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's perfect holiness, and that we ought to mirror His holiness.

And yet, who can do it? Who amongst us are 100% holy in ourselves? ourselves. And yet, we are declared holy in God's eyes because of Jesus, the one who took our defilement, our curses, our sin, and our shame.

He drank the bitter cup reserved for us, and therefore in Him, we are counted as holy. the only thing left to do is just to praise God and thank Him, and then live it out.

[27 : 29] Live out holiness. That status has been given to you. We are given the holy status. Now, live it out. Mirror more and more of God's holiness.

As 1 John says, God is light in Him. There is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, if we live holy as He is holy, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.

So, friends, how can you mirror more and more of God's holiness this week? What sin, what impurity, what moral defilement are you going to kill this week?

Let's pray. Father, we praise you because you are holy, you are perfect, you are glorious, but we are sorry that we can't mirror your holiness.

[28 : 57] We have done what we ought not to have done, and we have left undone what we ought not to have done. But we thank you that you have sent your Son Jesus to do all that for us perfectly, and you have credited His righteousness to us.

So now, Lord, help us with the power of your Spirit to live out that status that you have given us, so that the world might see your holiness.

In the name of Jesus, our Savior, the one who died outside of the city gate, we pray. Amen.

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