

Jesus and Biblical Law - Part 6

Ritual Purity Instructions

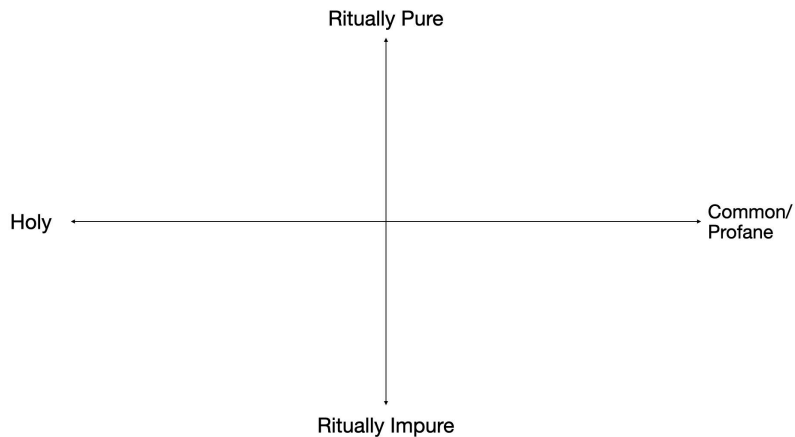
Torah/Biblical Law — Pentateuch; 613 law code instructions; literally: teaching/coaching or instruction

Holy — Things designated to exist in proximity to God's presence and Sacred Spaces.

Profane — Common, normal objects, places, people, and times.

Sacred Space (Tabernacle, Temple) — Holy places that contain the presence of God, representing life

Lepra — Skin disease that made dark skin white and flaky (likely eczema or psoriasis, not Hansen's Disease)



Features of ritual impurity:

- A symbolic/metaphysical state of being that represented/brought to mind mortality (*existing in bodies and a world of death*)
- Contagious through physical contact
- Different degrees and severity
- Contracted from physical contact with dead things, reproductive bodily emissions, or skin disease
- A very common state of being, not morally wrong or undesirable
- Affects the impure person, objects, and people they come into physical contact with, and the Sacred Space in their midst

Ritual purification for the individual comes through bathing and waiting before one can enter Sacred Space.

Features of moral impurity (serious sin):

- A persistent state of rebellion
- Not physically contagious
- A result of murder, economic oppression, sex crimes, or idolatry
- Purification comes from kharat or divine forgiveness
- Affects the person, the Sacred Space, and the land

KEY: The Gospel authors portray Jesus as a source of divine life and entirely mortal

- Jesus eliminates the sources of ritual impurity (*forces of death*) in healing those with lepra, impure spirits, bleeding issues, and those who have died
- Jesus eliminates his own death by contact with death
- Before his death, Jesus was also subject to ritual impurity (Luke 2)
- Jesus obeyed and instructed others to obey the ritual purity instructions
- Jesus was never confronted for touching those who were ritually impure, but for dining with those who were morally impure
- Hebrews depicts Jesus's resurrected body as no longer susceptible to death or ritual impurity, since it transcends morality, allowing it to continually exist in Sacred Space (the heavenly tabernacle) as a heavenly high priest and representative of humanity

Recommended reading

- *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* by L. Michael Morales
- *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism* by Matthew Theissen
- *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* by John Milgrom
- *Lamb of the Free: Recovering the Varied Sacrificial Understandings of Jesus's Death* by Andrew R. Rillera

Reading for next time

- Leviticus 4
- Leviticus 16
- Hebrews 9-10

Questions

- What misconceptions have you heard about ritual impurity?
- How do you think these ritual practices informed how the community thought about God?
- Why do you think Evangelicals and Western Christians have so often conflated ritual and moral impurity when reading the Bible?

