

A Short Teaching on Unclean  
by Deacon Gerry Palermo

Note: Contains a little speculative theology (one page limitation still applies).

Participating in a lecture series on the Gospel of Matthew there was a video segment concerning Matthew 8:14 where the presenter made the comment that under the Law 'Sin was stronger than the Law'. He suggested that during the leprosy healing accounts performed by Jesus Christ since the leprosy was completely and immediately healed it was not by Law but by Grace Incarnate, and therefore the Law – Grace theology divide is evidently seen. For him, (quoting) law is impotent in the face of sin. God forbid! Rather - Grace fulfills Law (make evident and reveals).

Directly countering 'weak law' theory would be Elisha-Naaman encounter (2 Kings 5:10 ff).

When Jesus said he came to fulfill the Law we should immediately understand there is already present in the Law the elements of divine fulfillment (atonement and justification). Jewish theology already contained the Suffering Servant (Isa 53) and Israel (as nation/tribe and as individual/circumcised) is already well established in the time of Jesus. Jesus personified the fulfillment of that reality without a break from tradition. Perhaps a leap forward in tradition.

Some food for thought.

Uncleanliness of Childbirth (see Leviticus 12:1-8).

Is a woman unclean in child birth or menstrual cycle? God forbid! She needs us.

Is a newborn child unclean? God forbid! He needs us.

These purity laws speak directly to the suffering servant role of the Jewish people. For a woman, who bears pain beyond what was in the garden (see Gen 3:16) is as a gift to human kind to reconcile creation under the Law. Also, when a child was born and therefore the sacrifice of two doves, one for a holocaust (praise) and one for a sin offering (which is a taking on the sin of the world). The atonement is a gift for all human kind, not for her uncleanliness or the child uncleanliness as defect, rather, the sin offering is an on-boarding of the Jewish person in his/her role a sin-bearer for the reconciliation of the world. In Jewish life they atone for one another and for all. Jesus fulfilled this Law completely as child in Luke 2:22-24. The dove representing non-human reconciliation and restoration. All creation participated in the purification of creation.

Unclean is a calling to be community. Read Exodus 12:1-16. Verses 15 and 16 show the solidarity with Miriam until she was brought back. Or Numbers 8:7; 9:7-10; 35-10-14.

Law is fulfilled in the ministry, life and teaching of Jesus the Christ – now we are talking sense. Law is not a mechanical or impersonal concept. It is relational.

So when we read...the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) is under the Law, the 'Is it lawful' discourses (Matt 12:10) is under the Law and so on. All these supposed breaks are not breaks at all but fulfillments. In time, Law is eventually expressed: Seek me and live (Amos 5:4).

When Jesus said 'go show yourself... to the priest' (Matt 8:4), it was a gift to the priests so they could know their work leads to restoration. If their faith was as Elisha, immediately, if as per ordinary men, eventually and mystically.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.

Jesus is the perfection of Torah in his person and reveals the power of Law as expressed now.

Peace be with you.

Deacon Gerry