

IMPURITY, PURIFICATION, RITUAL, AND SACRIFICE:  
OLD TESTAMENT REMINDERS OF OUR DEPENDENCE ON GOD

Ian Johnson  
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The thesis of this paper will be that, although many of the causes of impurity or uncleanness set forth in the Pentateuch are also sins, the state of impurity itself is not sin and is not a sin. Rather, the Law's pervasive reminder that state of impurity more often arises from innocent sources in everyday life than from personal sins was intended to serve as a continual reminder of individual dependence on God. Impurity, whether voluntary or involuntary, requires purification and, at some point, sacrifice, both of which are reminders of the need for God.

At the outset, it should be noted that this paper will assume that all of the passages that deal with holiness, purity, impurity and related concepts are part of the Word of one God and speak with a single voice, regardless of the number of authors who may have been involved in writing them and in spite of the apparent tensions between some of them. Many commentators disagree with this perspective, finding differing and sometimes incompatible views of holiness, purity and impurity in the hypothesized writings of the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the Deuteronomist (D), the Priestly School (P), and a fifth set of passages (essentially Leviticus 17-26 and Numbers 10) that some identify as the work of a fifth writer or school of writers, the Holiness School ("H"). For example, Jonathan Klawans presents rather briefly his conclusion that P and H were distinct sources, and that, where P focused on "ritual" impurity, H focused on "moral" impurity, although Klawans sees the concepts as complimentary (as will be discussed later).<sup>1</sup> Robert Kugler, who also focuses on Leviticus, believes that H represented a separate redaction after P was complete, and that the two come from different theological perspectives, specifically in that they take entirely different views of the scope of the holy that lead to

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Klawans, *Jonathan, Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, 2000), 21-22.

correspondingly different views of the sources and consequences of impurity.<sup>2</sup> Baruch Schwartz,<sup>3</sup> Cana Werman,<sup>4</sup> and Eyal Regev<sup>5</sup> take similar positions on this point—all three view H as an extension of P and not an entirely separate source. All three also view the essence of the extension as an expansion of the holy from the sanctuary and the priesthood only in P to the whole nation of Israel as a command or aspiration in H, in contrast to the way that E, D (and, for Werman, J also) posit holiness of the whole nation positionally.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Schwartz and Werman, Regev believes this difference causes D to present a view of holiness, purity and impurity that is essentially irreconcilable with that presented P (and H).<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this paper will proceed from the assumption that the whole Word speaks with a single voice, regardless of the number and chronology of the hands that wrote it.

The explanation of the thesis that the state of impurity is not sin but is a reminder of our need for God must logically begin with a discussion of the words used to convey the concepts critical to the subject of holiness, purity and impurity. An understanding of the language of holiness is important because the concept of impurity is sometimes portrayed as resting on a holy-pure-impure continuum, as Jacob Milgrom states most clearly and several other sources suggest.<sup>8</sup> This discussion is muddied somewhat by the fact that the root (*qdš*) of the Hebrew

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<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Kugler, "Holiness, Purity, the Body, and Society: The Evidence for Theological Conflict in Leviticus." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 76 (12/01, 1997), 9-11, 15-16, 19-20, 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> Baruch J. Schwartz, "Israel's Holiness: The Torah Tradition," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, Ed. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 52 fn. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Cana Werman, "The Concept of Holiness and the Requirements of Purity in Second Temple and Tannaic Literature," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 163-165.

<sup>5</sup> Eyal Regev, "Priestly Dynamic Holiness and Deuteronomic Static Holiness." *Vetus Testamentum* 51, no. 2 (01/01, 2001): 246-247, 252-253.

<sup>6</sup> Schwartz, 58-59; Werman, 163-166; 14 Regev, 246, 252-253.

<sup>7</sup> Regev, 249-253.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Milgrom, "The Dynamics of Purity in the Priestly System," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 29-30; Megory Anderson and Philip Culbertson, "The

words generally translated as “holy,” “holiness,” “sacred” and similar words, itself is either polysemic or homonymic, and can mean either 1) “set apart, separate” or 2) “clean, purified,” much as in English, although the first meaning is more common.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as Schwartz points out, the two lexemes associated with *qđš* may well have distinct Semitic etymologies and the two meanings may be distinct rather than overlapping.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it may be important to distinguish these senses of *qđš* in interpreting the passages in which the root occurs.<sup>11</sup>

Schwartz also makes the important point that, in contrast to the English word “holy,” the Hebrew *qđš* implies no ethical or moral value.<sup>12</sup> In English, that which is “holy” is understood to be morally good. In Hebrew, some but not all of the things that are *qđš* are morally good. Priests, for instance, may be either morally good or bad, depending on their conduct. However, even bad priests are *qđš* simply by virtue of their inherited office and ceremonial consecration.<sup>13</sup> The consequences of this for a morally corrupt or disobedient priest are illustrated by Nadab and Abihu, by Eli and his sons, and by the rejected priests at the time of the exile to Babylon.<sup>14</sup> Being set apart to God in this sense does not necessarily imply “holy” behavior.

The language applied to the realm of things that are not “holy,” in this generally value-free sense of set apart to God, is more complex, and apparently varies somewhat by time period and author in the Old Testament. An oversimplified first approximation of this domain would say that anything that is not “holy” is “common” (*hol*), and that “common” things and

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Inadequacy of the Christian Doctrine of the Atonement in Light of Levitical Sin Offering," *Anglican Theological Review* 68 (1986), 308-309; Regev, 248-249, 254-255; Kugler, 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> B. Schwartz, 47-48.

<sup>10</sup> B. Schwartz, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Marcel Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz, "Purity and Holiness: An Introductory Survey," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 10.

<sup>12</sup> B. Schwartz, 49.

<sup>13</sup> B. Schwartz, 53; Kugler, 10-11; Werman, 163; and see, Ex. 28:36-38; Lev. 8:30 [NIV, unless otherwise stated].

<sup>14</sup> Lev. 8:1-3; I Sam. 2:27-36; I Sam. 3:11-14; Jer. 23:11-12.

people are divided into “pure” (*tahor*) and “impure” or “unclean” (*tameh*).<sup>15</sup> As might be expected given the absence of any value judgment in *qdš*, the words associated with the concepts of “clean” (*naki*) and “impure” or “unclean” (*tameh*) also primarily denote a *physical* state which exists at a given time, and do not necessarily imply a moral judgment.<sup>16</sup> “Impurity” (or “uncleanness”) affecting individuals, the nation, or the sanctuary, may result from certain diseases, natural processes related to reproduction, impure actions or contact with impure people or objects.<sup>17</sup> Impurities are plainly divided into those for which specific washings and purification offerings are prescribed (e.g., Lev. 5, 11-15, 17:15-16), and those for which no specific rituals are prescribed (e.g., Lev. 11:43-45 and Lev. 18:24-30).<sup>18</sup> However, this simple division of the realm outside the “holy,” though useful, is shown to be an oversimplification by several considerations. Although in the Pentateuch *qdš* is generally used in its more common sense of separation, Baruch Schwartz<sup>19</sup> observes that there are texts in which it is obviously used in its secondary sense of cleanliness or purity<sup>20</sup> and that at a later period the author of Chronicles appears to use *qdš* and *thr* interchangeably.<sup>21</sup> There also exist apparently disjointed sets of things and actions that are declared to be “abominations,” some of which are also said to cause “impurity” in those who touch or do them, but others of which are not said to cause “impurity.”<sup>22</sup> Examples of abominations that cause impurity are idolatry and incest;<sup>23</sup> examples of abominations that are not said to cause individual impurity are use of dishonest measurements

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<sup>15</sup> Milgrom, “Dynamics of Purity,” 30; Anderson and Culbertson, 308-309.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson and Culbertson, 308-309.

<sup>17</sup> Kugler, 10-20; Klawans, 23-26; Gane, Roy E., “Privative Preposition *Mn* in Purification Offering Pericopes and the Changing Face of “Dorian Gray,”” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008), 211-212; and see, generally, Lev. 5:2-3; Lev. 11-13; Lev. 14:46-47; Lev. 15; Lev. 17:15-16; Lev. 18:6-24; Lev. 19:21; Lev. 20:3-6; Num. 19:1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Kugler, 10-20.

<sup>19</sup> B. Schwartz, 48, 48 fn. 6.

<sup>20</sup> See Ex. 19:10 & 22, Num. 11:18 and Lev. 16:19.

<sup>21</sup> , see, e.g. 1 Chr.15:12 & 14.

<sup>22</sup> Regev, 248-249; Mary Douglas, “Impurity of Land Animals,” in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*, ed. M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 34-35.

<sup>23</sup> Lev. 18:6-24, 19:4, 20:1-2; Deut. 17:2-4.

and women wearing men's clothing.<sup>24</sup> Bloodshed apparently causes the land but not the transgressor to become impure.<sup>25</sup>

Impurity is not, in itself, sin, and events which create impurity are not necessarily sins. According to Klawans, the followers of the Qumran sect in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. taught that all impurities, including those that arose by natural processes by no act of the impure person, are sins that require repentance and atonement in addition to ritual purification,<sup>26</sup> and others have since held similar teachings.<sup>27</sup> However, this view has always been in the minority, for several good reasons.

The views that all impurity is itself sin, or that all impurities are sins, is insupportable most obviously because it fails to take proper account of the moral culpability of sin. As Anderson and Culbertson explain, there are three categories of sins in the Hebrew Scriptures: inadvertent sins, also known as “missing the mark,” on the analogy of a person who draws a bow expecting to hit one target but who actually hits something else; advertent sins, which are premeditated but done to meet a human need without regard for culpability; and “demonstrative” or “rebellious” sins.<sup>28</sup> One thing all of these forms of sin have in common is that the sinner must *do* something that violates a commandment, either in its intention or in its practical effects. It has been said that, in Jewish thought, there are no sins of omission; while there are both injunctive and prohibitive commandments in Torah; “sin” refers only to the violation of a prohibitive commandment.<sup>29</sup> Or, stated another way, “sin is the transgression of the law.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Deut. 22:5, 25:15.

<sup>25</sup> Num. 35:33-34.

<sup>26</sup> Klawans, 86-88.

<sup>27</sup> Poorthuis and Schwartz, 8; Klawans, 10-11.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson and Culbertson, 308.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson and Culbertson, 307-308.

However, it is obvious that not all impurity that requires washing or sacrifice under the Law results from an act of the impure person, much less a culpable act of that person (even in the very weak sense of an inadvertent act). There are, as various authors have pointed out, two different kinds of impurity.<sup>31</sup> Klawans labels these two types of impurity “moral impurity” and “ritual impurity,” but also discusses with some approval the approaches of Adolf Büchler, who termed the two forms of defilement “moral” and “religious,” and David Hoffmann, who termed them “defilement that stands in opposition to holiness” and “defilement that stands in opposition to purity.”<sup>32</sup> Some impurity undeniably is caused by specific types of culpable acts. Idolatry, infanticide as a part of worship, bloodshed, adultery, various sexual sins in the family, and fraudulent business transactions (using differing measurements) are all morally culpable acts. Most of them are capital offenses, and all of them are said to cause impurity—though this impurity is said to rest on the sanctuary, the people, or the land rather than the guilty individual.<sup>33</sup> This is impurity of the “moral” variety. It is long-lasting, defiles the land on which the acts are committed, and is not associated with any individual purification ritual or sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> This particular subclass of moral impurity also arises from acts which are, for the most part, still viewed as heinous crimes (though one must doubt whether business frauds have ever been viewed as the equivalent of murder). The defilement caused by these acts can be removed from the individual, if at all, only through repentance, restitution, and the same annual sacrifices on the Day of Atonement that purge the land and the people as a whole of the same

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<sup>30</sup> 1 John 3:4b [KJV].

<sup>31</sup> Klawans, 5-6, 13-17, 22; Gane, 211-212, 217; Kugler, 9-12, 15-17, 19-20.

<sup>32</sup> Klawans, 5-6, 13-17.

<sup>33</sup> Klawans, 26; Kugler, 17-18; Werman, 165-167; see, Lev. 18:6-24, 19:31, 20:2-6; Num. 35:33-34.

<sup>34</sup> Klawans, 26-30, 34; Gane, 212-213, 215-216; Kugler, 18, 20-21; Werman, 165-167; see, Lev. 16:16, 18:25-28, 20:3; compare Ezek. 5:11, 36:17-19.

defilement.<sup>35</sup> If these were the only sources of impurity, it would be easy to argue that impurity is sin.

However, there is a class of arguably less culpable acts that renders a person impure, and in what appears to be a rather arbitrary manner. Some, but not all, violations of the food laws render a person unclean. Eating the meat of an unclean land animal is presented as a very serious sin that defiles both the sinner and the land.<sup>36</sup> Thus, eating the meat of such an animal appears to create an impurity of the “moral” variety, or at least similar to a “moral” impurity,<sup>37</sup> although Douglas and, according to her, Milgrom also would identify it as only a minor ritual impurity<sup>38</sup>. The list of clean land animals is very short, so that many very useful animals, including not only pigs but also dogs, camels and donkeys, are unclean to eat or to touch when dead.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, although a number of rational explanations of God’s cleanness criteria have been attempted,<sup>40</sup> none of them really works very well. The best explanation seems to be that of the First Century C.E. rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, who Moskala quotes as explaining that the laws pertaining to clean and unclean animals are arbitrary commands having reasons known only to God, and are given to the Jews as a demonstration of His authority and a test of their obedience.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Klawans, 26, 30-31; Gane, 214, 217-219; Anderson, 312-313; Jacob Milgrom, "Encroaching on the Sacred : Purity and Polity in Numbers 1-10," *Interpretation* 51, no. 3 (07/01, 1997), 242; Jacob Milgrom, "Impurity is Miasma: A Response to Hyam Maccoby," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 4 (2000), 732; see, Lev. 5:14-6:7; Lev. 16; Num. 5:5-10.

<sup>36</sup> Lev. 11:43-45, 20:25-26.

<sup>37</sup> Kugler, 17; Klawans, 31-33.

<sup>38</sup> Douglas, 34.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas, 39-40; see, Lev. 11:1-8; Deut. 14:3-8.

<sup>40</sup> Douglas, 37-45; Jiri Moskala, "Categorization and Evaluation of Different Kinds of Interpretation of the Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11," *Biblical Research* 46 (01/01, 2001), 5-41.

<sup>41</sup> Moskala, 7-8.

In contrast to eating the meat of an unclean land animal, touching its carcass renders a person unclean only temporarily, requiring washing and the passage of time to restore purity.<sup>42</sup> Thus, merely touching the carcass of such an animal—for instance, to dispose of it—is a source of impurity, but that impurity appears to be of the “ritual” variety.<sup>43</sup> Still, it means that the act of disposing of a carcass, an act that is required for the health of the community and not in any sense morally culpable, results in personal impurity. This is still an act, not a mere omission, but it is not a culpable act. It is difficult to argue that this act constitutes a sin.

On the other hand, other violations of the food laws do not render a person unclean, or, at least, are never explicitly said to do so. While eating forbidden land animals leads to uncleanness, eating forbidden birds and aquatic species is not said to cause impurity<sup>44</sup>. Eating these things is an “abomination,” but words suggesting impurity are never used<sup>45</sup>. This observation led Douglas to conclude that, if a temple guard asked a worshipper what he had for dinner, and he said “pork,” the guard would respond “one more step and I’ll bash your brains in,” but if he said “shrimp” (or “vulture”), the worshipper would receive a lecture about eating abominable things but would then be admitted to the temple.<sup>46</sup> This supports the conclusion that the food laws are essentially arbitrary tests of obedience, and that the sin involved—eating the forbidden food—is not the same thing as the impurity, which arises only when certain forbidden foods are eaten.

There is also a class of acts leading to impurity that, though usually voluntary, is necessary to life or to the life of the community. The great examples of this class of acts are

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<sup>42</sup> Lev. 11:24-31.

<sup>43</sup> Kugler, 12; 23 Milgrom, “Impurity is Miasma,” 730; Douglas, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Lev. 9:11-23; Deut.14:9-18.

<sup>45</sup> Douglas, 34-35.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas, 35.

contact with the dead, lawful marital sexual intercourse and its intended consequence, childbirth. God commends, and, in some cases, commands proper burial of the dead.<sup>47</sup> To prepare and bury a corpse, someone must touch it. Yet, contact with a corpse leads to a seven day period of ritual impurity, which can only be purged by sprinkling on the third and seventh days with water containing the ashes of a special community purification sacrifice, followed by bathing.<sup>48</sup> The same law applies to a person who unknowingly or involuntarily touches a corpse, who is present in the tent at the time of a person's death, or who touches a grave or a human bone.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, if anyone neglects to perform these purification rituals following contact with the dead, that person's ritual impurity apparently becomes a moral impurity and that person is cut off from his people.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, the first command God gave to mankind was to "be fruitful and increase in number."<sup>51</sup> Yet complying with this command requires sexual intercourse, an act which leaves the participants ritually impure for the rest of the day, even when performed lawfully within marriage.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, there are certain particularly solemn occasions that require abstinence from contact with the opposite sex for periods longer than a day in order to avoid impurity.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, if pregnancy results from the intercourse, childbirth—the exact fulfillment of the command of Genesis 1:28—causes the mother to be impure for 40 days after the birth of a boy,

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<sup>47</sup> Klawans, 24; see, Deut. 21:23; 2 Sam 2:4b-6.

<sup>48</sup> Klawans, 23; Jacob Milgrom, "The Paradox of the Red Cow (Num 19)," *Vetus Testamentum* 31, no. 1 (01/01, 1981), 62-72.

<sup>49</sup> Num. 19:1-19.

<sup>50</sup> Klawans, 25-26; Milgrom, "The Paradox of the Red Cow," 71; Milgrom, "Impurity as Miasma," 730; Num. 19:13, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Gen. 1:28.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Whitekettle, "Leviticus 15:18 Reconsidered: Chiasm, Spatial Structure and the Body," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* no. 49 (Fall 1991), 31-37; see, Lev. 15:18.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Ex. 19:15.

or 80 days after the birth of a girl.<sup>54</sup> Purification after childbirth requires washing and a sacrifice.<sup>55</sup> None of the acts described in this paragraph can properly be described as “sin,” yet all of them cause ritual impurity.

Finally, various diseases and physiological processes cause ritual impurity. Menstruation, which is experienced routinely by all women, causes ritual impurity for seven days, and also causes anyone and anything that touches her to become unclean until evening.<sup>56</sup> A man, who has a nocturnal emission, as is common for men, must bathe and be unclean until evening.<sup>57</sup> Any abnormal genital discharge also causes the affected person, male or female, to be unclean until seven days after the discharge ceases, at which time a sacrifice is required.<sup>58</sup> Further, there is a class of skin diseases (*tsâra'ath*), translated “leprosy” in many older translations including the KJV but obviously covering a range of visible manifestations much broader than Hansen’s Disease, that causes impurity that is difficult to categorize as either strictly ritual or moral, and that requires the exclusion of the victim from the community until the disease is healed and a relatively involved purification process involving quarantine, washing, shaving of bodily hair and a sacrifice is completed.<sup>59</sup> Menstruation, nocturnal emissions and diseases are normal incidents of life over which the person experiencing them has little or no control. They are not sins. Yet they can cause impurity that, at least in the case of impure disease states, has severe consequences and is relatively long-lasting.

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<sup>54</sup> Lev. 12:2-8.

<sup>55</sup> Kugler, 12; Milgrom, “Dynamics of Purity,” 30; Whitekettle, “Leviticus 15:18,” 37-38; Richard Whitekettle, “Levitical Thought and the Female Reproductive Cycle: Wombs, Wellsprings and the Primeval World,” *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 3 (1996), 376-91; see, Lev. 12:5-8.

<sup>56</sup> Kugler, 13, 15; Whitekettle, “Leviticus 15:18,” 37-39; Whitekettle, “Wombs, Wellsprings,” 379-380, 382-383; see, Lev. 15:19-24.

<sup>57</sup> Kugler, 13; Whitekettle, “Leviticus 15:18,” 34, 37-39, 43; see, Lev. 15:16.

<sup>58</sup> Kugler, 12, 14, 15; Milgrom, “Dynamics of Purity,” 30; Whitekettle, “Wombs, Wellsprings,” 379-381; Whitekettle, “Leviticus 15:18,” 37-44; see, Lev. 15:1-3, 13-15, 25, 28-30.

<sup>59</sup> 9 Poorthuis, 14; Milgrom, “Dynamics of Purity,” 30; Gane, 218-219; Kugler, 12, 15; see, Lev. 13-14.

As has been shown above, many of the causes of impurity are not sins, but are unavoidable incidents of normal life. Indeed, it can properly be said that, among a people that generally observes the prohibitory commands of the Law, the heinous offenses that lead to moral impurity will be rare, and the consumption of unclean land animals will also be rare, so that by far the majority of cases of individual impurity will arise innocently, from everyday life. But if this is true, the purpose of the regulations governing purity and impurity cannot be to teach the avoidance of impurity—because in most cases the causes of the impurity will be unavoidable. Instead, the purpose of these regulations is precisely to teach that impurity is unavoidable, that life itself in a sinful world leads to impurity that impairs access to God, and that God must be sought—through the prescribed rituals—to remove this impurity.

That the purpose of the laws dealing with impurity is to show that we cannot come to God unless He removes our impurities is demonstrated by the differences in the consequences of a state of moral versus ritual impurity. As several authors point out, most of the acts that create moral impurity, if they do not in fact result in the execution of the offender, do not exclude the impure person from the sanctuary or from formal worship there (eating impure land animals appears to be the only exception).<sup>60</sup> David, for instance, continued to be welcome at the sanctuary after committing adultery and murder.<sup>61</sup> Of course, a person who commits a heinous offense likely knows he or she needs God's forgiveness in order to safely approach God, and will either abandon God or seek His forgiveness—see, for instance, David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51. Even given repentance, however, atonement is also needed—not just individual atonement, the collective atonement provided by the collective penitence and sacrifices of the

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<sup>60</sup> Klawans, 27-30; Douglas, 34-35.

<sup>61</sup> Compare, 2 Sam. 11:2-5, 14-17 and 12:7-10, with 2 Sam. 12:19-20.

Day of Atonement.<sup>62</sup> The guilt of these offenses must be removed from the people, the land, and the sanctuary. No individual purification offerings are provided for acts constituting moral impurity.<sup>63</sup>

By contrast, the laws dealing with ritual impurity teach that, even when one attempts to live in conformity with the Law and successfully avoids gross offenses, those efforts will not succeed in maintaining sufficient purity to safely enter God's presence. Sin is inherent, and life itself routinely generates sources of unavoidable impurity. Seeking God for purification is still required. While the social consequences of the various forms of ritual impurity vary based on the source of the impurity from merely being unclean till evening to long-term ostracism, the ritual consequences before God are the same in all cases—the impure person is excluded from the sanctuary, except for the prescribed purification rites, and from public worship, until purification is completed.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, a “sin” or, better, purification (*ḥaṭṭa't*) offering is also required. The purification rituals for impurity from many of the more severe sources require individual purification offerings.<sup>65</sup> In these purification offerings, as Noam Zohar explains, the worshiper recognizes his or her residual uncleanness, regrets its source (even though that source is often not an individual sin), and casts it away in the blood of the offering.<sup>66</sup> Roy Gane also explains that Leviticus 16:30 indicates that the purgation on the Day of Atonement purifies the people of all their sins.<sup>67</sup> But even those ritual impurities for which no individual sacrifice is specified require washing to symbolically cast the uncleanness away from the individual, and the

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<sup>62</sup> 2 Klawans, 26, 30-31; Gane, 214, 217-219; Anderson and Culbertson, 312-313; Milgrom, “Encroaching on the Sacred,” 242; Milgrom, “Impurity as Miasma,” 732; see, Lev. 5:14-6:7; Lev. 16; Num. 5:5-10.

<sup>63</sup> Kugler, 17; Klawans, 26.

<sup>64</sup> Klawans, 22-23, 25; Kugler, 14-15.

<sup>65</sup> Poorthuis and Schwartz, 14; Gane, 217; Kugler, 11-14; Klawans, 23, 31-32.

<sup>66</sup> Noam Zohar, “Repentance and Purification: The Significance and Semantics of *ḥṭ't* in the Pentateuch,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 4 (12/01, 1988): 614-617, citing Lev. 16:16-22, 29-32.

<sup>67</sup> Gane, 214, 222.

annual release of the scapegoat (which Milgrom notes to also be a *hatta*'t offering, as both of the goats used on that day are) to cast them away from the community and the sanctuary.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the overall picture presented by the regulations dealing with impurity is that, though not all sources of impurity are sin (the most common ones are not), all impurity, regardless of its source, must be purged by repentance and sacrifice. When combined with the observation that the causes of ritual impurity are so common as to render such impurity unavoidable at times, it appears that the purpose of the laws pertaining to impurity is not to give those under it a list of conditions that must be avoided (which is impossible to accomplish), but rather to drive them to continual repentance and sacrifice. These regulations are, as Paul says, a “schoolmaster” (KJV) or “guardian” to lead those under it to Christ,<sup>69</sup> and its sacrifices, the writer to the Hebrews says, do not remove the consciousness of sins, but instead serve as an annual reminder of those sins. Heb. 10:1-3. The reality to which the symbolic reminders in the laws of impurity and the purification offerings actually point is Christ, who “by one sacrifice... has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”<sup>70</sup> Those who know Christ are no longer under the supervision of the Law<sup>71</sup>.

## MINISTRY APPLICATIONS

One rather obvious ministry application is suggested by the preceding paragraph: in preaching or teaching, some abridgement of the laws pertaining to impurity may be used to illustrate our continual need of God and of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. We are born into a sinful world, with sinful, corrupted natures inherited from our parents and, ultimately, from

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<sup>68</sup> Milgrom, “Paradox of the Red Cow,” 70, citing Lev. 16:5 & 21; Zohar, 612-613.

<sup>69</sup> Gal. 3:24.

<sup>70</sup> Heb. 10:14.

<sup>71</sup> Gal. 3:25.

Adam<sup>72</sup>. The primary implication of this is, of course, spiritual—because our hearts are corrupted, we sin with our bodies, and are incapable of doing any spiritual good before God in our own strength.<sup>73</sup> Our hearts, minds and consciences are inherently corrupt, and we are worthy of judgment, absent divine intervention on our behalf.<sup>74</sup> But the corruption of our natures has a physical side as well: our bodies are corrupted. The ultimate proof of this is that our bodies are dying.<sup>75</sup> But at a deeper level than this, our corrupted bodies drive us away from God and impel us toward sin. As Paul explained in the seventh chapter of Romans, when we desire to do good in our own strength, we cannot do it because of the “law of sin” which is “at work” in our “members,” that is, the members of our physical bodies.<sup>76</sup> The only hope of escape from this trap is the hope that Jesus Christ will rescue us from this body of death.<sup>77</sup> The Old Testament regulations relating to impurity, when applied as intended, are a reminder of this.

A second ministry application of this material arises when faced with people and groups that insist that certain aspects of the Old Testament purity laws, or some other set of “church” rules of behavior, are binding on Christians today, or even that we must in some sense earn our salvation by being careful to observe them. Such people are not particularly uncommon in evangelical churches. Wayne Grudem, in his textbook on *Systematic Theology*, even warns of the danger of “unconverted evangelicals” who believe that “mere association with an evangelical church and conformity to accepted ‘Christian’ patterns of behavior” is the same thing as salvation.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, several well-known sects and cults make strict observance of some

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<sup>72</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 494-497; see, Rom. 5:12-14, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Grudem, 497-498.

<sup>74</sup> Grudem, 497; see, Rom. 7:18; Titus 1:15.

<sup>75</sup> Rom. 5:16-17, 6:23; Heb. 9:27.

<sup>76</sup> Rom. 7:21-23.

<sup>77</sup> Rom. 7:24; Heb. 2:14-15.

<sup>78</sup> Grudem, 506.

subset of the purity regulations a centerpiece of their teachings, even though they must distort the identity of Christ or the meaning of his sacrifice in order to do so. A correct understanding of the purpose of the purity regulations can be used to counteract these teachings.

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