

Shaking Hands with a Leper

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Bible Matters Sources)

Introduction:

A. Describe a leper.

1. Leprosy - Hansen's Disease from mycobacterium leprae is primarily a granulomatous disease of the peripheral nerves and mucosa of the upper respiratory tract; skin lesions are the primary external sign. Left untreated, leprosy can be progressive, causing permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes. Contrary to folklore, leprosy does not cause body parts to fall off, although they can become numb or diseased as a result of secondary infections; these occur as a result of the body's defenses being compromised by the primary disease. Secondary infections, in turn, can result in tissue loss causing fingers and toes to become shortened and deformed, as cartilage is absorbed into the body. Transmission is unknown; 95% of the population is immune.

2. Would you shake hands with him?

B. Understanding uncleanness under the old law.

1. Some people temporarily made unclean by touching the dead - Lev. 15
2. Some declared unclean for a chronic condition, skin diseases - Lev. 13
3. Lev. 13:45-46 - unclean person cast out of the camp; was to cry out, "unclean! Unclean!" to warn others.

C. Purpose was not evil, but for the health of the community.

1. God was not punishing these people, but protecting the healthy.
2. Good science; if a disease has no cure, isolation is the only way to limit its spread.
3. Nevertheless, humiliating and difficult.
4. Persons not only have to suffer with the illness, but are viewed as outcasts; must intentionally keep others away from them.

D. Unclean persons in Gospels; different responses to unclean people in the NT.

1. The Pharisees and sinners - Matt. 9:11-13; Luke 7:36-50
2. How would they respond to one who is unclean, who could transmit ritual uncleanness to them?
3. Jesus when confronted by lepers and unclean people.
 - a. He has compassion on them and heals them.
 - b. Matt. 11:4-6; Luke 17:12-19
 - c. Matt. 9:20-22 - This woman was ritually unclean - Lev. 15:25-28
 - d. Did Jesus condemn the woman because by the contact He became unclean?

I. 21ST CENTURY UNCLEANNESS

A. There is no literal, ceremonial, or ritual uncleanness today under the new covenant - Eph. 2:11-18; Heb. 9:8-14; 1Cor. 8:8

1. However, there are many considered unclean.

B. People who are viewed as social outcasts, who many professed Christians would rather forget than accept.

1. Homeless persons
 2. People suffering from AIDS or other STDs
 3. Persons in poverty
 4. Drug users and alcoholics
 5. Prostitutes
 6. I am certain we could add to the list
- C. What are the possible reactions we can have to such persons?
1. We could just avoid them lest we be "contaminated."
 - a. What the Pharisees would do; they did not associate with sinners lest they become tainted.
 - b. It's easier to avoid them.
 - c. But is this what Jesus would have us do?
 2. We could also have compassion, as Jesus did.
 - a. Did Jesus show approval of sin and extortion by eating with sinners and tax collectors - Matt. 9:10-13?
 - b. Jesus ate with them, because they were sick and needed a Physician.
 - c. Matt. 25:31-46 - Have you ever considered what Jesus expects of you before He will admit you to heaven?
 - d. If we believe that eating with un-baptized sinners shows approval of their sins, then we also believe that Jesus approved of sin.
 - e. Might also include people considered unclean by society.
 - f. Does this legitimize sin?
 - g. How can they learn to avoid sin and to be cleansed unless we take the Gospel to them - Rom. 10:13-17?

Conclusion:

- A. Would you shake the hand of a leper?
1. Whatever it takes to facilitate teaching him the Gospel!
 2. After all, someone shook your hand and taught you the Gospel.
 3. If you believe yourself better than him, you probably won't see heaven regardless of how often you attend and take the communion.