

## **HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 6/21/2024**

### **The Purity Code**

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

There are many things about life in Palestine two thousand years ago about which we are unaware. Knowing these can help to make the gospels and JESUS' actions richer, more profound, and more understandable. We know the commandment, "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy," was strictly followed by the Jews of that time, but the implications for JESUS' healing may elude us. The Jewish law allowed for feeding animals, milking cows, and caring for animals on the Sabbath because not doing so could harm the animals. But to heal a person on the Sabbath violated the rules against work. Thus, when JESUS heals on the Sabbath, HE challenges the religious code that made rules more important than people.

The "Purity Code" had a tremendous impact on the lives of people back then, one we often miss because we don't live with such controlling structures today. But they had powerful implications for a person's relationship with GOD and their sense of self-worth. It defined who they were with the insinuation that GOD put them in this position. Often it was further understood as the consequence of something they or their parents or grandparents had done. It was GOD's judgment upon them and there was nothing they could do about it. This was particularly true with illness or affliction. It was GOD's punishment for some sinful behavior. (Think about how your life might be if that is how you understood any illness or condition with which you live.) Sometimes people might even ask, "What did you do to deserve this?" GOD is just and doesn't punish frivolously, so you must have done something. What would your relationship with GOD be like if this is what was taught today?

The Purity Code defined how close you could come to GOD. In the Temple, there were "courtyards" where people could gather to worship GOD based on their so-called level of purity. The courtyard closest to the altar of GOD was called the "Holy of Holies". Only the high priest of Israel could enter this area. It's like the area around the altar as St. Andrew at the top of the steps, except again, surrounded by a curtain. (Since no one else could go in there, the high priest had to tie a rope around himself and wear bells so that those outside would know he was okay. If the bells stopped ringing for a long time, a tug on the rope would remind the high priest to make some noise. If there was no response, the rope could be used to pull the high priest out of the "Holy of Holies.")

The next area was the "Courtyard of the Priests." It is the equivalent of the area just outside the altar railing before you get to the pews at St. Andrew. Only the priests could enter this courtyard.

Then there was the "Courtyard of the Men." This corresponded to the nave of our church where the pews are. Only Jewish men could be in this area.

Finally, there was the "Courtyard of the Foreigners and the Women." The entry or narthex to our worship center would be the comparable area. Women and believers in Judaism but who were not Jews by nationality could go no further toward the altar and GOD than this outer area.

The Purity Code provided a thorough ranking of individuals by their purity. You knew how favored you or your parents and grandparents were based on where you fall in this listing. From most pure to least, this is the ranking: (1) priests; (2) Levites; (3) Israelites (who weren't included in the first two groups); (4) converts to Judaism; (5) freed slaves; (6) disqualified priests and the illegitimate children of priests; (7) temple slaves; (8) people born out of wedlock (apart from those in (6), i.e. bastards); (9) eunuchs; (10) those with damaged testicles; (11) those without a penis (i.e. women). Consider how you might feel about GOD depending on the category into which you fell. Think about the power and influence that came with certain positions and the lack thereof in other positions.

The Purity Code is one of the things JESUS sought to challenge. The basis for the Purity Code was teachings in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Over the centuries, it was expanded due to teachings by none other than the priests and the Levites. The result was that ritual impurity was the guiding principle in the division of Jewish society into classes and again, people understood it as an indication of how GOD felt about the various groups. JESUS' message of GOD's equal and unqualified love for all people struck directly at the Purity Code. When HE talked with women, foreigners, or the infirm much less touched them, HE was calling into question the validity of these rules. JESUS' message was that there is nothing that can separate us from GOD's love. It is unconditional and available to all who choose to receive it.

In CHRIST's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey