

Leviticus 14:1-9 – “Officers in the Trenches”

Introduction: We see God’s love because he sends men to care for us, body and soul, to point to Christ’s care for us, body and soul.

1) The Priest Offers Sacrifice

- There isn’t a simple link between the priesthood and the diaconate, however they demonstrate a similar concern to care for the people, a concern found most perfectly in Christ (see Luke 5:12-16).
- This text is dealing with someone who has leprosy. This is not the leprosy of today. This word covered a multitude of skin problems. It is particularly the ones that caused discoloration that made the person unclean and forced them to live outside the camp.
- Uncleanness is not the same as sin. People were often made unclean by things associated with the curse: death and decay. This even included good things like childbirth. Many in Israel would have spent most of their lives unclean. Uncleanness was not sin itself, but a reminder of sin. It forced them to always consider whether they were allowed to come to the tabernacle or temple. This kept their lives focused on God’s house, and reminded them that they could not approach him unless they were clean.
- As part of his duties it was normal for a priest to go out to the lepers in Israel, to take time inspecting them and to bring to them the blood that would cleanse them from their uncleanness. This is one way in which we see Jesus in the priesthood. Jesus, too, went to the sick and weak and took away the reason for their uncleanness. This pointed to the fact that he would also wash them from their sins in his blood.
- We see this same care for the suffering in the office of deacon. Their role is to go to those who are distressed and care for their physical needs. The deacons do far more than count money, they come to us when we are needy to ensure that we feel God’s care for us.

2) The Leper is Cleansed

- In addition to the typology of blood, there is a beautiful symbolism in this ceremony. The dipping and sprinkling are substantially the same act: the bird and leper are both ‘covered’ in blood. The bird is then set free into the field, and the man comes back into the camp. They are swapping places, both going home.
- To demonstrate this new life, the man shaves his whole body and washes his clothes and body. This removes every remnant of his time outside the camp. It also indicates to the community that he is officially returning, and must be welcomed.
- The priest would also be present for him to make his first offerings after being away for some time because of his uncleanness. There is a link between the physical and spiritual care. The same is true of Jesus, he healed people to free them to follow him and have eternal life.
- The deacons do the same. They serve a spiritual purpose with physical care. Meeting our physical needs gives us the peace of mind to worship God freely, confident in his care for us. In that role they also open God’s word and teach us about him.

- We must never see our diaconate as a second-class office or a training ground for eldership. It is a ministry created by God to show the care that he has always had for his struggling people.