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## SPIRITUAL LEPROSY - Faithlessness

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We don't have to worry about leprosy now days! Or should we? We may not suffer from the physical symptoms of leprosy but do we suffer from spiritual leprosy?

The healing of the man full of leprosy is a story about how the Lord is able to work a miracle in our lives from being faithless to being faithful. The leprosy describes our state before we have faith in the Lord. Our spiritual state that is represented by leprosy is a state in which we find ourselves as teenagers, young adults and still today in each one of us as adults. Leprosy represents a state in which we have been educated about the Lord, heaven and hell, about marriage and other life truths from His Word but there is not internal acknowledgement. We have not seen these truths as vital for our life here on earth and for a life here after. Never the less it is a state that the Lord is willing to work with us on and is always working on.

Leprosy is a disease that attacks the skin and the nerves. Leprosy cause rashes and scaling of the skin and is the leading cause of crippling of the hands. Leprosy slowly removes the life out of the skin taking with it sensation and movement. In the world at the time of Jesus, if you had leprosy you lost out on more than just sensation in your skin, you lost out on being touched. You lost your connection with family and with society, confined to a leper colony outside of town separated from life.

The disease of leprosy separates the sufferer from the life of society because of an external attack and distortion of the skin. In our spiritual life leprosy represents a separation we have with true life which is the Lord. In spiritual terms leprosy in this story represents faithlessness. We could be called faithless because we know nothing about the Lord and eternal life. But the faithlessness in this story is not because we haven't been taught the truths from the Lord's Word but because we haven't acted on those truths. We haven't taken those truths and made them important enough in our lives to affect the way we think and act. There is another spiritual term this type of faithlessness is called profanation.

In a broad sense profanation is taking what is good and true from the Lord and not using it in the way it was intended but rather to support what is false and evil, thereby removing life out of the truth and turning it into something distorted and powerless.

Both Leprosy and profanation take what is healthy, distort it and remove the life out of it. Because of this correspondence between leprosy and profanation, when we see the many descriptions of leprosy in the Word we know that there are many forms of profanation too. Some forms more serious and some light. Today's story describes one that is less serious.

It represents a profanation in which we know the truth but the truth has no power to affect our lives. We may know that the word teaches that we should not get angry, from Matthew we know, "One who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." (Matthew 5:22)

But imagine for a moment you come home from a long days work, struggling to meet deadlines. You are tired, you just want to put you bags down and get off your feet for just a few minutes. Before you can put your bags down your children are dancing around you excitedly shouting "Let's go to the park," and from your less than excited state you lose your temper with your children and banish them outside.

Did you know that you weren't supposed to get angry? Yes. Did you try not to get angry? Briefly! We all experience situations like this. We know the truth but there was no power in that truth to stop us from getting angry.

You may have experienced in one of your relationship with a sibling, a parent or with your spouse that you have a clash of personalities and you don't want to be seen as weak or wrong. You know that the commandment to not covert also means not wanting to have dominion over a person. But as soon as that family member or spouse brings up that touchy subject and has a differing point of view, you find yourself fighting to defend your point of view, defending your pride at all costs and in the process flinging stinging remarks to cut them down.

Did you know that you weren't supposed to belittle people to make yourself feel strong? Yes. Did you try being rational and calm? Briefly! Again we know what is true but the truth has no power. Like the leprous skin that doesn't have any life in it, neither do some of the truth in our lives.

Have we profaned against the Lord? Yes we have. Will the Lord leave us because we are weak? No, the Lord never leaves us and He is always working to bend our live to what is good and living. The Lord is constantly working through people in our lives and through the events that happen around us, and to us, to bring us to a point where we are open to the Lord and His message to us.

In the story today we read, "Behold, a man who was full of leprosy *saw* Jesus." It appears to the man that he can now see Jesus. It appears to us that when we learn something true or when we talk to someone who inspires a true thought that *we see* the truth that *we see* what the Lord was trying to say in His Word. But the reality is the Lord has been preparing our minds to receive His truths and He is the one who is teaching us (DP 135) through His Word, through people and events around us.

When we say, "I have seen Jesus," it mean that we have seen something true from the Lord's Word. Once we see the truth it is a part of our memory. We can recall it and think about it but it is not yet a part of us. We can think about what is true but we haven't changed our focus on it, to bring it from our memory, to be front and centre in our live. If a truth was front and centre in our live we would focus on living that truth as we went through the day. It would always be as a reminder guiding our thought and actions as we deal with people and situation.

We may think, "OK, now I know and now I'm going to change my like according to this truth." But like the previous examples, we *still* get angry when we know we aren't supposed to. Or we *still* attack and belittle people when we feel our pride and reputation is threatened. So what do we do? How do we get these truths to stick and make a difference in our lives? How do we have real faith in our live? How do we get out of a state of profanation?

In order for us to make any spiritual change in our lives we have to start with repentance. The actions of the leprous man and the response from Jesus show us the four steps that need to happen in order for healing to come from the Lord.

The first step is finding in ourselves the diseased part of our life and recognising it as unhealthy. The leprous man knew his state; he new he was not winning the battle against the disease. This is our state when we know we shouldn't get angry or we know we have a problem with protecting our pride and appearing strong, but we cannot win against the thoughts and emotions that swamp us in those trying times.

The second step is shown by the leprous man "fell on his face." Falling on ones face is a sign of humility, humility of our hearts and minds. We read from Arcana Coelestia,

True adoration or humility of heart entails prostration before the Lord face-downwards on the ground as the natural action resulting from it. Indeed humiliation of heart entails the acknowledgement of oneself as being nothing but uncleanness, and at the same time the acknowledgement of the Lord's infinite mercy towards such. When these acknowledgements are fixed in the mind, the mind itself casts itself down towards hell and prostrates the body. (*Arcana Coelestia 1999*)

In humility to the Lord we are acknowledging a particular weakness in our lives. In our examples, we acknowledge that by being angry, when we know we shouldn't, is profanation and is sin against the Lord. We acknowledge that our pride and reputation are more important than other peoples feeling and is not loving the neighbour thus sinning against the Lord. In our hearts we should feel sadness and grief that our state is far from what the Lord wants for us. When we are in humility of heart and mind then automatically our hearts open up.

The third step is the opening up of our heart. Out of an open heart flow the words of true prayer asking for help. The word used is "implore" or to beg. The leprous man was begging for help from the Lord and praying, begging the Lord for help comes out of our state of humility before the Lord. We realise that the Lord is the only source of help to get us out of the ingrained habit or out from under a dominating emotion that overshadows our attempts to do what is right.

In the words of the pray offered to the Lord, the man acknowledges two important things, "Lord, if you are willing" and, "You can make me clean." The first question is a rhetorical question, 'Lord, if you are willing.' Is not the essence of the Lord pure love? How could a loving God not be waiting to heal? This is a reminder to us of the great love that the Lord has for us. He does not condemn us to hell, He is constantly trying to lift us up and heal us of our disease.

The next statement is a recognition of power, "You can make me clean." In our state of humility of heart and mind we come to acknowledge that only the Lord has the power to change us. Only the Lord can move aside our faults and short comings to bring His truths front and centre in our live. Only the Lord has the power to resist the attack of anger, or the pull to reputation and honour. In a state of humility we may look back at our attempts to change our life on our own and realise just how futile they were.

When we have examined ourselves and found our fault, turned to see the Lord and humbled ourselves before him and then lifted our prayers for help and strength from the Lord, then the Lord touches us. "He put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.'" What is in a touch? What is in the Lord's touch? When we think of touch in terms of those we love, touch communicates the shared love of husband and wife. Touch communicates caring for another's needs. Touch is vital for the proper development of a baby. Touch brings security and safety to the lives of children. The Lord's touch in our lives brings all of these, love, caring, growth, security, safety and all of these rest in the over arching sense of peace. When the Lord touches our lives we are a peace with the world and with ourselves knowing from a deep place within us that we are safe in the Lord's hands.

The final step is a charge that the Lord leaves with the man, "tell no one, but to go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded." The Lord did not want the man to stop and to think about what had happen but to go and do what was asked of him by law. After we have been through humility and been touched by the Lord, his charge is a familiar one to us in the New Church, the Lord wants us to go and "begin a new life." We begin a new life by abstaining from evils and living what we know to be a good life.

We may not have to worry about physical leprosy these days, but spiritual leprosy or profanation is part of our lives that we need to continually go to the Lord for healing. As teenagers, as young adults and as mature adults we need to be aware of areas in our lives that are faithless,

things that we know to be true but lack life in them to be a guiding force in our life. Find those areas that are lacking life, as a leprous hand lack life, and humbly beg the Lord to work a miracle of healing in your life.

“I am willing” the Lord says, “be cleansed”

AMEN

Lessons: Luke 5: 12-14, Leviticus 13:1-14

A person makes a life for himself out of all his convictions, that is, out of what he acknowledges and believes. The things of which he is not convinced, that is, which he does not acknowledge and believe, have no influence at all on his mind. Consequently nobody is capable of profaning holy things except him who has been convinced of them and so acknowledges them and yet denies them. People who do not acknowledge are capable of knowing, but they are in the same position as those who do not know. They are like people who know things which are nothing at all. Of such a nature was the church around the time of the Lord's Coming. And when people are such they are in the Word called 'vastated', that is, faith no longer exists. That being so, no harm is done if the inner contents of the Word are disclosed to them, for they are in that case like the people who seeing do not see, and like the people who hearing do not hear. Furthermore mysteries of faith are not disclosed until people reach this point, that is to say, have been so vastated that they no longer believe, the purpose of the vastation being, as has been stated, to make them incapable of profaning. (*Arcana Coelestia 303*)

When anyone is such that he immerses the truths of faith in his own insane desires he renders truths unholy and deprives himself of remnants which, though with him still, cannot be brought out. For the instant they are brought out they in turn are rendered unholy by those things which are already profaned. For profanations of the Word create hard skin so to speak which blocks and absorbs into itself the goods and truths constituting remnants. This being so, let man be on his guard against profaning the Word of the Lord in which eternal truths are present that have life within them, though the person who is under the influence of false assumptions does not believe that they are truths.

(*Arcana Coelestia 571*)