

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY-CHARLOTTE

MENSTRUATION AND THE FEMALE BODY IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY:  
A LOOK AT LEVITICUS 15:25-30

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## Introduction

On June 6, 2020, a Twitter storm erupted over a tweet sent out by author J.K. Rowling, most famous for her Harry Potter series, that questioned an article's headline, "Opinion: Creating a more equal post-Covid-19 world for people who menstruate,"<sup>1</sup> to which Rowling responded, "'People who menstruate.' I'm sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?" The controversy surrounding the nomenclature of gender and menstruation has only accelerated in the time since, coinciding and merging with other conversations regarding gender, biological sex, transgenderism, and feminism, particularly in but by no means limited to the Western world. For the Christian church, Catholic and Protestant alike, questions about gender, the body, and the *imago dei* abound considering these cultural concerns, and in recent years, an extraordinarily large amount of literature has been written in attempts to articulate and address anthropological theology, or also referred to as Christian anthropology. In his forward for Sam Allberry's book titled *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, Paul David Tripp writes, "A church that doesn't have a robust gospel theology of the body will be unprepared to meet this generation's philosophical, psychological, sociological, scientific, and media challenges."<sup>2</sup> This paper endeavors to contribute to the larger conversation by examining a particular facet of the female embodied experience, namely menstruation, and will demonstrate that Scripture's understanding of a monthly menstrual cycle is distinctly a feminine experience and serves as a physical embodiment of God's redemptive plan for

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<sup>1</sup> Marni Sommer, Virginia Kamowa, Therese Mahon, "Opinion: Creating a more equal post-Covid-19 world for people who menstruate," <https://www.devex.com/news/sponsored/opinion-creating-a-more-equal-post-covid-19-world-for-people-who-menstruate-97312#.XtwLnv0aEeR.twitter>.

<sup>2</sup> Paul David Tripp, foreword to *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies*, by Sam Allberry, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 13.

salvation. Though menstruation is given uniquely to women, it does not follow that there is not wisdom for the wider church, that is, for men and women alike. This paper will focus on the particular condition of abnormal menstrual bleeding as described in Leviticus 15:25-30 and its prescription for ritual cleanliness and purity. By examining how Scripture speaks to the physical reality of menstruation, we will glean a better spiritual understanding of Christ's atoning work and how the female body points to God's historically redemptive plan, from Genesis to Revelation.

### **Literary and Theological Background: Genesis 1-3**

Before dissecting the particularities of Lev 15:26-30, it is essential to understand menstruation in its literary and theological context; historical context will be addressed as it pertains to the law. Because menstruation is part of the reproductive system in the female body, it follows that a brief examination of Gen 1-3 is necessary for grasping the Levitical law and its eschatological fulfillment. Two main points must be observed: 1) In Gen 1:27-28, God creates humanity as sexed and sexual beings, male and female, both made in his image; and 2) Gen 3:15-16 speaks directly to the woman's design for carrying children as integral to her identity and highlights the new reality of the female embodied experience, for the woman and her female descendants, as one that is marked with pain and toil.

First and indeed critically, God creates humanity in binary fashion: male and female. However, it is incorrect to see humanity as the introduction of binary sexual beings; indeed, plant life and the animal kingdom have their reproductive capacities that exhibit maleness and femaleness.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, as Kevin DeYoung writes, "The way the creation account

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<sup>3</sup> G. Ch. Aalders observes, "A new element introduced in the execution of God's creative purpose is the distinction of the human sexes – 'male and female he created them.' The words are not the usual Hebrew words

spells out sexual difference is so obvious that we can miss its importance. God does not mention the difference of, say, height or hair color or temperament or gifting. The one identity marker emphasized at the beginning is maleness and femaleness.”<sup>4</sup> The two sexes are equal in dignity and worth and yet distinct in their form and functions. Regarding menstruation, this is an important foundation; the two separate sexes cannot produce life independently, rather there is an intrinsic interdependence. That said, it is the female body, not the male body, that is designed to carry and birth new life, thus fulfilling the cultural mandate of Gen 1:28. The PCA Papers on Human Sexuality includes helpful language on the distinctiveness of the two sexes, their intrinsic goodness, and the warning that they are not to be confused with one another while recognizing that in a fallen world there will be at times confusion in this area.<sup>5</sup> Scripture is silent on whether the female body experienced a painless, bloodless menstruation prior to the fall, but Gen 1 does include language concerning the life’s natural rhythms and the goodness and blessing of procreation.<sup>6</sup>

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for ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ The words seem to specifically designate the distinction of the sexes – male and female. In verse 22 we are told that God blessed the animals and made them fruitful. This implies that the two sexes were also created among the animals, but there it is not specifically mentioned. That this is specifically pointed out in the case of humanity must have a definite reason. This must be found in the fact that the distinction of the sexes in humanity was to develop into a completely unique relationship, namely, holy marriage. This we have here a preparation for the revelation of the beautiful mystery of marriage which will be given in chapter 2.” *Genesis*, (Bible Student’s Commentary; 2 vols; trans. by William Heynen; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 1:72.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 26.

<sup>5</sup> PCA Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality. *A Body for the Lord: The PCA Papers on Human Sexuality*, (Lawrenceville, GA: PCA Discipleship Ministries, 2021), 21.

<sup>6</sup> James Dixon’s commentary on Gen 1:27-28 is particularly moving and pertinent: “Within the framework of propagation of the species, there comes another of those kinds of special positions reserved only for those blessed with ‘life.’ That is the nurture and care of the young. The blessing of re-creating yourself carries with it the awesome responsibility of caring for those you bring into the world. This is God’s wisdom at work. The greatest thrill of humanity is wrapped in the fellowship and joy of those whom we were responsible for bringing into the world. God has truly blessed us with this reality. He is also teaching us. By our rejoicing over the young, we can consider the full meaning of God’s rejoicing over his creation. Also, in this light, it helps

Second, God's pronouncement of judgment on the serpent and on humanity includes direct mention of the woman's reproductive system; for this paper's purpose, we mention here only that it is through the woman's ability to give birth that humanity looks for the promised seed to crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15) and that this ability to give birth will be marred with pain (Gen 3:16).<sup>7</sup> Here, it is helpful and necessary to state that a woman is not reducible to her physical form and function<sup>8</sup>, yet neither should we dismiss the body as irrelevant. Consider Nancy Pearcey's helpful argument against the body/person dichotomy:

“Personhood theory...presumes a very low view of the human body, which ultimately dehumanizes all of us...Yet Christianity holds that body and soul together form an integrated unity—the human being is an embodied soul...By contrast, personhood theory entails a two-level dualism that sets the body against the person, as though they were two separate things merely stuck together. As a result, it demeans the body

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us reflect on how God must react to those who sense no responsibility in the caring for the young.” *Expository Thoughts on Genesis*, (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>7</sup> The man and the woman will both experience pain in their post-Edenic life. Derek Kidner observes, “Pain and bondage now appear on the horizon. Two kindred words are used in 16 for the repeated *sorrow* (AV, RV) or *pain* (RSV), the first of which exactly recurs in 17c for the ‘toil’ (RV, RSV) or ‘sorrow’ (AV) imposed on Adam. A possible rendering each time would be ‘travail.’” *Genesis*, (London: Tyndale Press, 1967; repr. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 76. Carol Meyers explores the Hebrew terminology, writing: “Let us begin with the second of the two nouns of line 1, the word often translated ‘childbirth’ when hendiadys is assumed. The Hebrew term *heron* in fact does not mean childbirth. In the developed biblical vocabulary of human reproduction, it refers to the period of pregnancy and not to the process of childbirth, which terminates pregnancy...In general, [heron] might refer equally to any or all of the nine months of human gestation. However, the word shows a tendency to be more associated with the initiation of pregnancy rather than with its duration or conclusion.” Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102.

<sup>8</sup> Consider Rachel Jones' encouragement to her readers: “One way to ‘read’ our periods as they arrive, showing us that – as far as we can tell – things are generally running a-ok in there, is to remember ‘God made me as a woman with the ability to grow a baby. That’s pretty cool.’ Now, I realise I might have lost some of you there. First, because sounding like you might be saying, ‘a woman’s purpose is to have babies’ is pretty offensive to 21<sup>st</sup>-century ears. Second, because for many women, everything is not a-ok in there, and periods that are late, heavy, sporadic, absent or agony are sometimes a symptom of that. And as soon as you are trying to get pregnant, each new period brings with it a sense of disappointment that you’re not – and perhaps a rising tide of grief and fear that you never will be. These are painful emotional and physical realities.” *A Brief Theology of Periods (Yes, Really)*, (London: The Good Book Company, 2021), 31-32.

as extrinsic to the person—something inferior that can be used for purely pragmatic purposes.”<sup>9</sup>

As the events of Genesis unfold, the realities of the embodied female experience feature prominently: fertility and infertility, menstruation and menopause, new life and maternal death. And since menstruation is the monthly shedding of the uterine wall owing to the absence of an implanted, fertilized egg, it serves as reminder for both the hope of new life and the emptiness of the womb. In Scripture, while husbands and the community at large are affected, these reproductive processes and events are distinctly and universally feminine; much of the narrative action in Genesis and beyond hinges on whether a woman, such as Rebekah or Sarah, will have a child. It is also interesting to highlight God’s particular and personal pronouncement in Gen 3:15-16.<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew first person is used in Gen 3:15, *תִּשְׁאַלְתָּ*, or “I will put,” and in Gen 3:16, *תִּרְבֹּה אֶרֶבֶת*, or “I will greatly increase.” In these two verses, God himself is ordaining enmity and pain, as opposed to simply describing the new fallen reality in Gen 3:17-19; he is simultaneously ordaining redemption.<sup>11</sup> God is protecting the promised seed of Gen 3:15 through all of womanhood’s pains and travail, month in and month out until the birth of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> All Scripture quotations in English are ESV, and all Hebrew quotations are from the BHS, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>11</sup> James Dixon writes, “The curse that is pronounced on the woman carries a strange irony. The suffering that is presupposed is ominous. The sound of God’s judgment is frightening and creates the sense of trembling in one’s bones. However, there is hope. God is establishing in his judgment that the sin of the man and the woman is not the final word. He will redeem. The only way back into relationship with God must be through the work of God. In the announcement of the curse, God is proclaiming, ‘I have a plan.’ Despite the ominous sound of judgment there is also a sigh of relief.” *Genesis*, 97.

## Leviticus 15:25-30

<sup>25</sup>If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness. As in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.

<sup>26</sup>Every bed on which she lies, all the discharge, shall be to her as the bed of her impurity. And everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her menstrual impurity.

<sup>27</sup>And whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>28</sup>But if she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean.

<sup>29</sup>And on the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting.

<sup>30</sup>And the priest shall use one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her before the LORD for her unclean discharge.

וְאֵשֶׁת כִּיְצֹוב זֹב קְמָה יָמִים רַבִּים בְּלֹא עַתָּ-  
נְדָתָה אוֹ כִּיְצֹוב עַל-נְדָתָה כָּל-<sup>12</sup> יָמִים זֹב  
טְמָאָתָה כִּיְמִי נְדָתָה תְּהִיכָּה טְמָאָה הוּא

כָּל-הַמִּשְׁכָּב אֲשֶׁר-מִשְׁכָּב עַלְיוֹ כָּל-יָמִים זֹב  
כִּמְשַׁכָּב נְדָתָה יְהִינָּה וְכָל-הַכְּלִי אֲשֶׁר-מִשְׁבָּת  
עַלְיוֹ טְמָא יְהִינָּה כְּטַמְּמָתָה נְדָתָה

וְכָל-הַגּוֹגָע בָּם יְטָמָא וְכָבֵס בְּגַדְיוֹ וְרַחַץ בְּמַיִם  
וּטְמָא עַד-הַעֲרָב

וְאַמ-טְהָרָה מְזֻבָּה וּסְפָרָה לְה שְׁבָעַת יָמִים  
וְאַחֲרֵי תְּהִירָה

וּבַיּוֹם כִּשְׁמִינִי מִקְהָדָה שְׁפֵי תְּרִים אוֹ שְׁנִי בְּנִי  
יְוָנָה וְהַבִּיאָה אֹתָם אֶל-הַכְּלָנוֹ אֶל-פְּמַתָּח אַחֲל  
מוֹעֵד

וְעָשָׂה הַכְּלָנוֹ אֶת-הַאֲחֵד חַטָּאת וְאֶת-הַאֲחֵד עַלְהָה  
וּכְפֵר עַלְיָה הַכְּלָנוֹ לְפָנֵי יְהָוָה מְזֻבָּה טְמָאָתָה

Leviticus is the third book of the Pentateuch, and it can be described as the “Book of Holiness.” Michael McKelvey writes, “The holiness of God constitutes the central theme in the book of Leviticus, which, in turn, demands the holiness of Israel...Notably, the Hebrew

<sup>12</sup> Holladay explains that the usage of כָּל indicates totality; כָּל is used five times this passage, indicating the extensiveness of the woman’s uncleanness. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of The Old Testament: Based Upon The Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 156-7.

root for holy, holiness, or consecrate (שְׁמִרָה) occurs some 143 times throughout the book—by far the most of any Old Testament book.”<sup>13</sup> Leviticus 15 is one of several chapters that deals with ritual purity or cleanliness and immediately precedes what several scholars see as the pinnacle of the book, namely Lev 16 which details the Day of Atonement, followed then by Lev 17:11 as, pertinently, Israel is told, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.” The chapter deals with bodily emissions from reproductive organs and is highly structured. Consider the following organization of the chapter:

A Long-term male discharges (15:2-15)

B Short-term male discharges (15:16-17)

C male and female together (15:18)

B<sup>1</sup> short-term female discharges (15:19-24)

A<sup>1</sup> long-term female discharges (15:25-30)<sup>14</sup>

There is a symmetry and a logic in the organization of the chapter that highlights the two sexes and their innate equality and dignity.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Lisa Chisholm-Smith writes, “What

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<sup>13</sup> Michael G. McKelvey, “Leviticus,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, (ed. Miles Van Pelt, Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 94.

<sup>14</sup> John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Leviticus*, (New York, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 203.

<sup>15</sup> R.K. Harrison writes about the chapter’s structure, “This type of pattern is known technically as chiastic, and was a favourite literary device among the Hebrews for demonstrating the fundamental unity of a double-sided phenomenon. This unity also extends to the relationship of the sexes, reflecting the affirmation of Genesis that male and female were made in the divine image (Gn. 1:27). A final touch of literary artistry has been seen in the mention of coition at the central point of the case discussions. In this act both male and female can express their sense of physical and emotional unity as they demonstrate the oneness of their humanity.” *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, (The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D.J. Wiseman; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 159.

is striking about Leviticus 15 is how consistently the laws regarding bodily emissions are applied to both sexes.”<sup>16</sup> While there is equity in the purification processes, there is distinction in the emissions themselves. The female’s discharge is that of menstruation, not that of the male’s as described earlier in the chapter. Menstruation, whether short-term or long-term, normal or abnormal, is categorically a feminine experience, and the chapter’s chiastic structure emphasizes that reality. While there is speculation concerning what menstruation was like for women in the ancient near east<sup>17</sup>, Scripture repeatedly features women who would be potentially experiencing menstruation regularly and with turmoil; these are the women God chooses to work in and through to produce the promised seed of Gen 3:15.

The particular verses of 15:25-30 are at the outer fringes of the chapter, followed by the chapter’s conclusion: “Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in the uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst. This is the law for him who has a discharge and for him who has an emission of semen, becoming unclean thereby; also for her who is unwell with her menstrual impurity, that is, for anyone, male or female, who has a discharge, and for the man who lies with a woman who is unclean” (Lev 15:31-33). Again, the two sexes are emphasized as well as their equitable

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<sup>16</sup> Lisa Chisholm-Smith, “Menstruation,” in C. Clark Kreuger ad M. J. Evans (eds.), *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 62.

<sup>17</sup> Sarah Harris addresses this in her article in reference to the first century, writing, “In ancient times, and in some parts of the world today, women do not menstruate every month. There are many reasons for this: when women do not have accessible or desirable contraception, they are more likely to be pregnant for most of their child-bearing years with little space for bleeding to re-establish itself...these [agrarian] cultures often see childbearing and child raising as a valued part of womanhood. Therefore, it is quite possible that for women in the first century, most of the years from early marriage (aged 12-14) to 35 or 40 when a woman may no longer have children or the body is too tired or menopause begins, there is little sign of regular menstrual bleeding.” “The Bleeding Woman: A Journey From the Fringes,” *Feminist Theology* 29:2 (2021), 117-8.

treatment under the law. Just as with the long-term male discharge, the long-term female discharge renders one unclean and anyone or anything that comes into physical contact until there is stoppage of the flow, followed by bathing and washing, and then the presentation to the priest of two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, given on the eighth day, symbolizing the new creation or rebirth. Here, Derek Tidball is helpful: “The purity rules never provide a cure. They simply mark the recovery when healing has taken place...[The] sacrifices were those of the burnt offering and the sin offering, which expressed renewed commitment and renewed cleansing.”<sup>18</sup> The declaration of purity is predicated on the eventual termination of menstruation or blood loss. Importantly, these verses do not suggest that there is a particular sin that requires atoning; rather, as the chapter’s last verses indicate, there is a need for communal purity and the protection of God’s holy tabernacle. Again, Tidball offers insight: “What is clean is associated with life and what is unclean is associated with death. The situations in Leviticus 12 and 15 all involve the loss of the bodily fluids—blood and semen—that bring life...God, the giver of life, wants his people to treat life itself with respect.”<sup>19</sup> Such sustained bleeding is abnormal and thus could be a sign of some other injury or illness of the woman’s reproductive system. And certainly, if a woman continually bled, she would be at risk of death.

The relationship between sin and purity is complex, but there is no suggestion that the woman with abnormal bleeding has committed a particular sin until and unless she does not

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<sup>18</sup> Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus*, (The Bible Speaks Today series, eds. Alec Motyer, John Stott, Derek Tidball; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 164-5.

<sup>19</sup> Tidball, *Leviticus*, 167.

heed the regulations set forth for her.<sup>20</sup> However, her state of uncleanness does render her incapable of freely moving around the community and from participating in corporate worship.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Lev 20:18 offers a clear prohibition of intercourse during a woman's menstrual cycle. Thus, a married woman experiencing the symptoms of Lev 15:25-30 would not be in a situation to potentially birth offspring, which would be socially, and potentially emotionally, difficult. The hope of pregnancy would be constantly dashed and unrealized, echoing the pain of Gen 3. For a woman experiencing abnormal bleeding as described in Lev 15:25-30, she would constantly be reminded of the reality of death and the need for cleansing and restoration.

### New Testament Fulfillment and Redemption

Considering that Lev 15:25-30 deals with the occurrence of abnormal menstrual bleeding, and as M. Sydney Park puts it, "an awkward, if not tactless, topic for discourse,"<sup>22</sup> it is rather remarkable that three of the New Testament Gospels record an event in which a

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<sup>20</sup> From Keil and Delitzsch: "Continuance in [uncleanness] was followed by death, not merely in the particular instance in which an unclean man ventured to enter the sanctuary, but as a general fact, because uncleanness was irreconcilable with the calling of Israel to be a holy nation, in the midst of which Jehovah the Holy One had His dwelling place (chap. xi. 44), and continuance in uncleanness without the prescribed purification was a disregard of the holiness of Jehovah, and involved rebellion against Him and His ordinances of grace." C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on The Old Testament*, (vol. II, The Pentateuch; trans. Rev. James Martin; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 394. Also, from Currid: "Sacrifices are necessary because these problems are abnormal and they reflect lack of wholeness." *Leviticus*, 210. M. Sydney Park writes, "Apart from the impurity necessarily implied in נָجָד and נָגָד, the verb ("to be impure, unclean") and its cognates further punctuate the concept of uncleanness for women in Leviticus (12:2 [2x], 5; 15:19, 20 [2x], 21-23, 24 [2x], 25-26, 27 [2x], 33). The obverse to נָקָד, נָקָד ("to be pure, clean") and cognates also appear in these texts (12:4, 6-8; 15:28 [2x]),<sup>15</sup> providing the means to transit from the state of impurity to purity. The condition of impurity is temporary; yet, undeniably, purity is also temporary as the woman repeats the cycle monthly and with childbirth." "Inerrancy and Blood: Women and Christology in Leviticus 12 and 15, and Mark 4:21-43, *Presbyterion*, 45/1 (Spring 2019), 87.

<sup>21</sup> Harris disagrees with this conclusion and discusses Talmudic evidence to suggest that the woman would have lived a fairly normal life, "Bleeding Woman," 122-8. However, Keil and Delitzsch, Tidball, Currid, Harrison, and Park would affirm that the bleeding woman would not be permitted into corporate worship, at minimum.

<sup>22</sup> Park, "Inerrancy and Blood," 83.

woman is healed of this specific malady. Park writes, “[d]espite this unease, Scripture in no way demonstrates that same awkwardness about women’s physiology.”<sup>23</sup> The episode of the bleeding woman is chronicled in Matt 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, and Luke 8:43-48, usually following the healing of the demoniac in Gerasenes and occurring within the story of Jesus’ healing Jairus’ daughter. Sarah Harris connects several key details between the story of the bleeding woman to Jairus’ daughter as recounted in Luke: “[B]oth have significant female characters; Jairus and the woman fall before Jesus (vv. 41, 47), the period of 12 years (vv. 42, 43), physical touch is involved in both stories (vv. 44, 45, 46, 47, 54), both deal with matters of impurity (vv. 43, 53, 54), present desperate circumstances (vv. 42, 49), and speak of faith (vv. 48, 50).”<sup>24</sup>

The story of the bleeding woman as presented in Mark 5:21-43 is a classic example of what is typically called the “Marken sandwich,” a term that refers to Mark’s pattern of placing a story inside a larger story, usually giving interpretative clues to the whole narrative. This narrative is a distinctly female-centric story space, emphasizing their physiology: the woman “came up behind [Jesus] and touched his garment (Mark 5: 27) and “felt in her body that she was healed of her disease” (Mark 5:29); Jesus took the little girl by the hand (Mark 5:41), then instructed her parents to “give her something to eat” (Mark 5:43). The life in both females, young and old, is draining away; the bleeding woman has been dealing with a sign of death, and the twelve-year old girl is on the verge of and indeed succumbs to death. As Lev 15 makes clear, uncleanness, a sign connected with death, requires purification, and the concluding verses of Lev 15 emphasize the need for stringent regulations against defiling

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, “Bleeding Woman,” 115.

God's holy tabernacle. Yet, Jesus, God's beloved son (Mark 1:11), who describes himself as God's temple (John 2:19) can cast unclean spirits with a word (Mark 1:21-28), touch a leprous man without contracting the disease (Mark 1:40-45), and heal many sick people without becoming unclean himself. The bleeding woman reaches her hand out in faith to touch his garments, and Jesus reaches out and touches the dead child, two situations in which Jesus would become ceremonially unclean. Harrison writes of the bleeding woman, "For her, holiness had a contagious quality from which she could receive special benefit, and her faith was such that she expected complete healing just by touching the border of Christ's robe."<sup>25</sup> Christ's holiness "infects," so to speak, the woman, not the other way round.

Park makes an illuminating connection between the woman's bleeding and Christ's work:

"The correlation between woman's blood and Christ's blood begins in Leviticus. There are only two kinds of living beings that bleed with regularity in the cultic life of Israel as described in Leviticus: fertile women and sacrificial animals. Through blood, the woman brings life and, most critically, also sin and death... By contrast, through blood shed, the sacrificial animals die in order to bring life, that is, atonement, to the people...in his humanity (flesh and blood), Jesus dies so that "through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb. 2:14—15). Jesus's *sui generis* sacrifice obviates the need for any further sacrifices as it destroys death and sin without contest."<sup>26</sup>

This fits with the redemptive arc of the female body and God's pronouncement in Gen 3:16. In 1 Cor 6:19, Paul writes, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?" Women intrinsically understand that their body is a potential home for another life, and they are reminded of this reality monthly. The message of

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<sup>25</sup> Harrison, *Leviticus*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Park, "Inerrancy and Blood," 92-93.

Christ is that his shed blood produces new life, and that this new life resides within the believer. The female body illustrates this analogy, thus fulfilling the eschatological promise of Gen 3:15-16. Finally, and redemptively, the only garments tinged with blood at the end of the age belong to those who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14), no more filthy rags.

## Conclusion

In 2023, much is changing, and changing quickly, around subjects like menstruation, gender, biological sex, and fertility rates. The female body is at the center of many conversations within the church,<sup>27</sup> and often, the eschatological trajectory of the feminine experience is neglected. Lev 15:25-30 speaks to a distinctly female experience, one that simultaneously speaks to her womanhood and to her need for cleansing and healing. It is also the last case study prior to regulations detailing the Day of Atonement; the woman’s bleeding condition functions as a prologue to instructions regarding the mercy seat, priestly garments, sacrifices, and sprinkling of blood. Did the woman in Mark 5 ruminate on Lev 15:25-30, knowing that in the next few verses, there would be a way for atonement and restoration? Did she connect Jesus with the mercy seat of God? As Jesus Christ demonstrates and as the New Testament explains, Christian women are no longer bound to the purification laws of Lev 15:25-30; however, these laws instruct all believers in understanding Christ’s blood and his purifying touch. Women should find solace in Christ’s care for the bleeding woman and for the promise of a glorified body in the age to come. For now, it is the woman’s painful but hopeful distinction to experience menstruation just as it is her place to analogize creation’s

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<sup>27</sup> For a particular poignant and timely article, please see Katelyn Beaty’s piece, “Single Women Are More Than Their Wombs,” *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/september-web-only/singleness-infertility-marriage-women-more-than-wombs.html>.

groaning (Rom 8:22). The female body is not to be worshipped or idolized, nor is it to be abused or violated; it is to be honored. Men and women alike in the church must honor women's bodies for several reasons. One reason is that there are God-ordained stories embedded into our very design. Scripture honors the bleeding woman of Mark 5:21-43 for her faith in the true healer. Indeed, God himself has honored the female body by inscribing the very nature of death, life, and redemption into its fabric and rhythms.

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