

“To defecate” or “to relieve oneself.” While the word itself may seem crude or archaic, it is deeply rooted in a biblical context where hygiene, order, and reverence for God’s presence are emphasized. This is not merely about physical cleanliness, but a reflection of spiritual discipline and respect for God’s holiness.

In Deuteronomy 23:13–14 (NKJV), God gives specific instructions to the Israelites:

“And you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse. For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you.”

1. God’s Presence Demands Holiness

The key theological point here is that God dwells among His people. His presence is not symbolic or metaphorical; it was real

and active among the Israelites. Therefore, everything about the camp had to reflect His holiness including how they managed bodily waste.

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly emphasizes that holiness is not just spiritual but also practical. This includes dietary laws, cleanliness laws, and even sanitation practices (see Leviticus 11-15). These were not arbitrary rules; they symbolized deeper truths about purity, obedience, and reverence.

Leviticus 19:2 (NKJV) “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’”

2. God Sees the Physical and the Spiritual

Contrary to the common belief that “God only looks at the heart,” the Bible teaches that God is concerned with both the inward and outward life. The way we present ourselves, our surroundings, and our bodies reflects the state of our hearts.

Paul affirms this in the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NKJV) “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

If our bodies are temples, then our behavior, clothing, hygiene, and lifestyle choices must align with the sacredness of God’s dwelling place.

3. Cleanliness as a Reflection of Divine Order

The instructions in Deuteronomy were not merely for health reasons but were symbolic of the moral and spiritual order God expected from His people. Dirt, uncleanness, and disorder symbolized sin and rebellion in the Hebrew mindset.

Jesus also used the theme of internal vs. external cleanliness to teach deeper truths:

Matthew 23:25-26 (NKJV) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.”

In this context, Jesus wasn’t rejecting physical cleanliness, but rebuking those who only focused on appearances without inward transformation. The true call is to pursue both inner purity and outward holiness.

Cleanliness, Modesty, and Respect for God

If God was willing to withdraw His presence from the Israelite camp due to uncovered human waste, what does that say about how we live today?

- How we dress matters. Immodest clothing that exposes or emphasizes the body in sexually provocative ways goes against the principle of honoring God with our bodies.
- Our environment matters. Living in filth and disorder can reflect spiritual neglect and disrespect for God’s presence.
- Our physical choices matter. Tattooing, body mutilation, and other practices that dishonor the body should be seriously reconsidered in light of Scriptures like Leviticus 19:28 and Romans 12:1.

Romans 12:1 (NKJV) “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV) “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The command in Deuteronomy to bury human waste may seem minor, but it speaks volumes about how seriously God takes order, purity, and reverence. The same God who walked through the Israelite camp now lives within us by His Spirit. Therefore, we must strive to keep our bodies, spirits, and surroundings holy.

May we not fall for modern teachings that reduce holiness to only inner intentions. God is concerned with the whole person body, soul, and spirit.

May the Lord bless us as we seek to live lives that are clean, holy, and pleasing to Him.

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