

**SINNERS:**

- In Jewish culture wealth and good health were seen as a reward for virtue and 'right living' whilst poverty, blindness and other illnesses were seen as punishment for sin.
- The term 'sinner' was also related to a person's state of purity (cf Ch 5.4). The Pharisees in particular thought that those who did not purify themselves were in an ongoing state of sinfulness ('Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners...' - Mt 9:11).
- The sins of the parents were seen to be transferred to their children, especially through genetic disabilities, such as blindness or deafness ('Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' - Jn 9:2).
- In the Jewish tradition sinners who broke the law were expected to publicly acknowledge their sin, arrange for appropriate compensation (Zacchaeus offering to repay fourfold anyone who he defrauded - Lk 19:1-10) and commit themselves to following the law into the future.
- Demonstrating contrition was especially difficult for social outcasts (prostitutes) as, by and large, they would be unable to provide appropriate 'compensation' (A sinful woman forgiven - Lk 7:36-50).

**LEPERS:**

- The term 'leper' referred to people who were suffering from a variety of skin diseases - only some forms were contagious. The symptoms of leprosy ranged from white patches on the skin and running sores to the loss of the fingers and toes. The disease deadens nerve endings, so that lepers could cut or burn themselves without even realising it. The average course of the disease was around nine years and ended in mental decay, coma and ultimately death.
- Lepers were ostracised and forced to live in colonies outside the city limits. It was thought they would contaminate others in both a physical and religious sense.
- Leprosy was seen as a punishment for sin; therefore lepers were moral outcasts as well as physical outcasts.
- Lepers were required to give warnings and cry out; "unclean, unclean" whenever they approached the members of the community (Mk 1:40-45). A leper's voice became progressively hoarse because of ulceration of the vocal chords. Lepers could not come within two metres of person when the wind was not blowing, or within 30 metres if there was a chance of contamination due to a breeze. Physical contact was strictly prohibited. These laws were vigorously enforced by the wider Jewish society.
- By even touching a leper Jesus could have been placed outside the 'community' (both as ritually and physically unclean) and may have been forced to stay outside in places where nobody lived.
- It would have been unusual within a colony of lepers for there to be a mixture of Jews and Samaritans (Lk 17:11-19). The presence of a Samaritan further emphasised the social dislocation being suffered by lepers.
- When a leper was cured certain purification rites were performed by the priests. It was only after purification that lepers could again come into contact with friends and relations and rejoin the community.
- If a Samaritan was cured (Lk 17:16) they would not have been able to go to a priest in Jerusalem because they were excluded from entering the Temple.