

Don't be Unclean, Do be Holy

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[0:00] For those who are already back in, you might like to grab a Black Pew Bible, unless you've got your own, and turn to Leviticus chapter 11. So Leviticus chapter 11, it's page 108 for those with the Black Pew Bible.

How about I pray for us again as we look at God's word together. Gracious Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that it is God-breathed and useful for correcting, training and equipping in righteousness.

And Father, we thank you that even these tricky parts of your word that seem so far from us in terms of context, you still speak to us through it.

And so Father, we pray that by your spirit you would help us to hear it and to put into practice what you have to say for us today. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I thought I'd start with a confession.

I'm pretty sure I have some OCD. Obsessive-compulsive disorder. Because every Sunday morning, one of the first things I do is I tidy up all the chairs out in that morning tea room.

[1:09] And this morning I felt really bad because I was doing this after Ricky had already done it. I'm sorry, Ricky. I felt really bad. I was wondering why they were almost perfect.

Anyway, I have a bit of OCD. And so I've also been known to restack the dishwasher at my house. Now I just stack it myself. And at the morning service I did see a number of people being elbowed.

And I also like to be clean. So much so that when I was a kid and I went camping with a group, it was a boys' brigade group, like scouts kind of thing, I actually took my own dustpan and brush to sweep out the sand from the tent.

And the kid who was sharing the tent with me couldn't come into my tent without wiping his feet first because I also took a hand towel and made it as a little doormat. And apparently this cleanness set me apart as unique amongst the group, as different.

To the point that at our wedding, the camp leader, years later when Michelle and I were married, the camp leader that day, he remembered this and he did one of those impromptu speeches, you know, those ones that you really don't love. And he even brought a dustpan and brush.

[2:23] And the point of the story is that being clean can set you apart as different, distinct, which is what it means actually to be holy.

And so remember, as we heard in the kids talk this week, as well as last week, holy means to be set apart as different, distinct, special to all others.

And that's God. There is no one like God. He is completely set apart as different. To the world and to all other so-called gods.

There is no one who is as pure as him, as powerful as him, as loving as him, and so on. God is holy. And that's what today's chapters 11 to 15 are all about, being ceremonially clean in order to be set apart as different or holy.

But 11 to 15, that's five chapters of, you know, hard work. And so you'll be glad to know we're going to focus on one chapter today, although it is a big one. But first, some background.

[3 : 29] There were three ceremonial states that Israel could find themselves in, which are represented by that diagram on the screen. You might think that unclean and clean are opposites, but in Israel it was actually unclean versus holy.

They were two ends of the spectrum. They were the opposites. And both had degrees, which I've tried to represent with that kind of grey shading, getting darker as you go to the opposite ends.

So, for example, you might remember in the tabernacle there's the holy place, and then there's the most holy place, degrees of holiness. So also with uncleanness, as we'll hear later in our passage today, if you just touch an animal, then you would be unclean.

But if you pick it up, you are more unclean. Degrees of uncleanness as well. What's more, there's not just degrees in these holy, unclean categories.

These ceremonial states weren't necessarily moral states. That is, it wasn't usually wrong to be unclean. In fact, in some cases, like childbirth or skin disease, you couldn't help it if you were unclean, if you had those things.

[4 : 45] But being unclean did defile God's house, his tabernacle, because it was the opposite to holy on the diagram. So much so that at the end of these chapters, in chapter 15, verse 31 on the screen, God says to Moses and Aaron, And so it wasn't wrong to become unclean, but it was dangerous to stay unclean.

Instead, you needed purification and sometimes atonement to be made clean again. And so it's why God gave these laws in chapters 11 to 15, so that they could avoid becoming unclean.

And when they did, know how to become clean again, that in turn, they might be set apart as holy. And so the broad overview of the chapters, chapter 11 was about avoiding becoming unclean from certain animals.

And then chapters 12 to 15, where it was about the focus was becoming clean from certain life situations. Whether childbirth or skin disease and so on. But again, the point is, just as my cleanness when I was camping, in turn set me apart as different, you know, if you like, made me holy in that sense.

So Israel's cleanness would, in turn, set them apart as different from the nations. Make them holy, as God is set apart as different and holy.

[6 : 25] It's kind of like what food laws do today, really. I mean, if your food law was to eat only vegetables, I just go by the answer, then what kind of person would you be?

A vegetarian. It set you apart as different, a vegetarian. If your food law was to eat fruit only, then it would set you apart as a fruitarian. That's a real thing, by the way.

Well, in a similar way, these food laws set Israel apart as God's holy people. This is the big idea. Let me show you, though, from the Bible, so you don't take my word, but God's word for it.

So if you've got your Bibles, chapter 11, verse 1, we're at. The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Say to the Israelites, Of all the animals that live on the land, these are the ones you may eat.

You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud. Now, a divided hoof is like a cow. So there's the cow on the screen.

[7 : 26] You can see the split on the hoof there. And a non-divided is like the horse, right? A horseshoe kind of thing. And to chew the cud means you kind of chew a bit like this guy.

You know, you kind of chew it around your mouth, a bit like my kids do at dinner times. But it's not just the way you chew the food. It's actually what the cow or the ox is doing. They're bringing back up partly digested food, aren't they?

And then re-chewing it again. And to be clean and edible, the animals had to meet both those criteria. They had to have a divided hoof and they had to chew the cud, like bulls, sheep, goats, which are the same sorts of animals that we've seen being offered to God earlier in Leviticus.

The same sorts of animals that were food offerings that God ate, so to speak, which kind of makes sense, doesn't it? You know, they are to eat the similar things that God ate, so to speak.

But again, the focus in this chapter is to avoid becoming unclean. And so there's much more time given to the animals that are unclean. Do you see verse 4?

[8 : 36] There are some that only chew the cud or only have a divided hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof.

It is ceremonially unclean for you. The hyrax, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof. It is unclean for you. The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a divided hoof.

It is unclean for you. And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud, it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses, they are unclean for you.

And so the Jews, the Israelites, they could ride a camel, but they couldn't eat a camel. Doesn't sound very appetizing to me anyway. But I actually do like bacon and eggs, but again, the Jews, it was eggs only, no bacon.

Now there are lots of different theories about why these animals were counted as unclean. One of the most common ones is to say that it's for health reasons, because uncooked pork can carry disease, but that's true for other uncooked meats, they could eat too.

[9 : 40] And what's more, that health reason doesn't quite work for the next group of animals, the sea creatures. Do you see verse 9? Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams, you may eat any that have fins and scales.

But, all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales, whether among all the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water, you are to regard as unclean.

And since you are to regard them as unclean, you must not eat their meat, and you must regard their carcasses as unclean. Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be regarded as unclean for you.

And so this rules out lobsters and oysters and all other sorts of shellfish, which aren't inherently bad for you, are they? They're not. And so the health reason doesn't seem to fit here.

Now, it could be part of the reason for the next group, the flying creatures. So he moves on in verse 13. Verse 20.

[11 : 09] And so here you can eat some insects, which may sound gross to us, but many cultures do it.

And apparently locusts are very high in protein and they are crunchy. But again, the focus here is on what they cannot eat, like the bat, which does carry diseases.

Like rabies, I think it is. But again, this health reason doesn't fit with all of these birds, like the hoopoe bird. Anyone heard of a hoopoe bird? I think we've got a couple from Africa who have heard of it.

It's this African bird, which looks quite magnificent, really. It's quite colourful with a big crown on its head. As far as I know, they do not carry diseases. In fact, they actually carry a good bacteria, which they coat their eggs with to protect their young.

And so this health reason doesn't account for all the animals that are unclean. Instead, the focus at this stage is simply to avoid becoming unclean by eating them or by even touching their dead bodies, the carcasses, which becomes the focus in the next part of the chapter, point to verse 24.

[12:46] He says, You will make yourselves unclean by these. Whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening.

Notice here there are different levels of uncleanness, as I mentioned before. You just touch a dead animal, and you just have to wait till evening, and then you clean again. But if you pick it up, you're more unclean because you have to wash your clothes as well.

And so you needed to do more to be cleansed. And maybe this washing of clothes, maybe it was to help stop spreading germs as well, but we're just not told that. What we are told is that the uncleanness of dead bodies can spread to make people unclean too.

And perhaps this is because death is the opposite to God, who is life. That seems to be one underlying reason in the following chapters, 12 to 15, where people, if they either lose blood or have a disease or lose other fluids, which all represent a loss of life, then they are unclean because God is life.

And so when you're unclean, it stops you from coming to God's tabernacle to have fellowship with Him. But again, remember, being unclean didn't mean you were unrighteous.

[14:13] Like becoming unclean from working in the garden doesn't make you unrighteous, does it? Though it may stop you coming to the dinner table, mightn't it? Until you wash your hands and get cleaned up. Or in a similar way, it stopped them coming to have dinner with God, if you like, because God is holy and He is life.

And so any loss of life, like a dead animal, is unclean. And touching it stopped you from coming to God's house until you were clean. And so verses 26 to 28, He then applies that principle in verses 24 and 25 about waiting till evening or washing clothes.

He applies that principle to the carcasses of land animals that are unclean, like the pig and rabbit we saw before. And then if you come with me to verse 29, we meet a new group of animals.

And He talks about their carcasses, the ground animals that include reptiles and small mammals. Verse 29, He says, of the animals that move along the ground, that's why I've called them ground animals, these are unclean for you.

The weasel, the rat, any kind of great lizard, the gecko, the monitor lizard, the war lizard, the skink and the chameleon. Of all those that move along the ground, those are unclean for you.

[15:27] Whoever touches them when they are dead will be unclean till evening. Weasels and rats, they kind of sound unclean, don't they? It sounds good category for them.

But this group actually seems to be worse than the others because the uncleanness of their dead bodies can spread not just to people but also to objects.

Verse 32, when one of these creatures dies and falls on something, that article or object, whatever it is, will be unclean, whether it's made of wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth.

So put it in water and it will be unclean till evening and then it will be clean. If one of them falls into a clay pot, everything in it will be unclean and you must break the pot.

Any food you're allowed to eat that has come into contact with water from any such pot is also unclean. And any liquid that is drunk from such a pot is unclean. Anything that one of their carcasses falls on and becomes unclean, an oven or a cooking pot must be broken up.

- [16:35] They are unclean and you are to regard them as unclean. Now there is a certain logic to all this. Wood, cloth, hide, sackcloth, when you put it in water, it soaks up the water, doesn't it?

You know, you put your clothes in the washing machine and the water comes on, it just soaks up the water, doesn't it? And so the water does cleanse these things. But pots are glazed. It doesn't soak up the water.

And so they cannot be cleansed, they have to be broken, which sounds rather harsh to us, doesn't it? But commentators say that these pots were cheap and easy to make, you know, sewing and making clothes and getting hides, that was actually the expensive stuff.

And so while it would have been annoying if you found a dead rat in your pot, although I think I'd be tempted to throw that pot away too, God's law also showed care for His people because it was the cheapest stuff that had to be broken.

Whereas the other stuff they really needed remained clean, like verse 36. He says, a spring, however, or a cistern for collecting water remains clean.

- [17:41] But anyone who touches one of these carcasses is unclean. You see, a spring or cistern has lots of water, so the logic was it had enough water to cleanse itself, but it also showed care for God's people because if a whole cistern or spring became unclean and they couldn't drink it, they just lost their whole water supply, didn't they?

But God's Lord says, no, no, it stays clean. You can still drink from it. There's a care for His people as well. And so with these laws, some of them could have been about for health reasons like not eating bats that carry diseases or washing your clothes.

And some of them could have been because death is the opposite to God who is life, and so carcasses made you unclean. And some of them were to care for His people like not making the whole spring unclean.

But there's no one reason that fits them all until we get to the end of the chapter. So point three, verse 43. Have a look at verse 43.

Do not defile yourselves by any of these creatures. Do not make yourself unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them. For I am the Lord your God.

- [18:52] Do not make yourselves consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy. You see the reason? The one reason is God is their God, which means they are to be holy because He is holy.

And just in case they don't get it, God repeats it. The rest of verse 44. He again says, Do not make yourselves unclean or defiled by any creature that moves along the ground.

Instead, verse 45, I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God. Therefore, be holy because I am holy.

You see, God saved them from Egypt to be their God, which means they are to be set apart as different, distinct, special, holy because God is set apart as different, distinct, special, holy.

This is what it means to have God as their God. And perhaps this seemingly randomness of all these animals is actually deliberate because no Jew could say, oh no, we're not allowed to eat those animals for health reasons.

- [20:05] No, no. They could only say we're not allowed to eat those animals for holiness reasons. Perhaps it was deliberate to make that point. This is the one reason for all these laws so that they could say they were holy.

And there was three aspects to this holiness. First, it reminded them they were set apart as special from the nations for God. And so just as God set apart some animals as special from all the animals for them, so he set apart the Israelites as special from all the nations for him.

We see this later on in Leviticus as well. And so Leviticus chapter 20, for example, he talks about making distinction between clean and unclean animals. And notice the reason in verse 26, you are to be holy to me because I am the Lord am holy and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own, to live for me, in other words.

And so first, these food laws reminded them that they are holy and that they were set apart as special from the nations for God. But second, these food laws also help them to continue to be holy, to be set apart as different to the nations and like God instead.

And so as they followed these food laws, it would make them different, wouldn't it? Distinct to the nations. Just as God is different and distinct to the world.

[21 : 49] Because eating different food can really make you stand out as different, can't it? Like Ian. Not the Ian out here, but the Ian up here. Yes, sorry, everyone, this is Ian.

Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Ian! Aunt Vula! When you come to my house and I cook for you.

Okay. Ooh, uh, yeah, that might be a problem. What's the problem? I'm the best cook in the family, tell you. Oh, I did, didn't I? Twice. Okay, then. Oh. Um, it's just, uh, yeah, Ian is a vegetarian.

He doesn't eat meat. He don't eat no meat. No, he doesn't eat meat. What do you mean he don't eat no meat? Oh, that's okay.

That's okay. I make lamb. And so not eating certain food made him stand out in a Greek family. And Tula from our congregation, who is Greek, says it's absolutely true, every bit of it.

[22 : 58] And so in a similar way, what Israel did not eat would make them stand out as different to the nations and be like God instead.

And not just with what they ate, of course, but later on in Leviticus, how they lived, how they treated one another, their morals and the like as well. In other words, these food laws helped them to be holy as God is holy.

And so these food laws also showed them their holiness was to be all of life. I mean, we eat quite a bit, don't we? We eat quite regularly, don't we? We've got three meals every single day.

That's a lot of eating. And so every time they ate, every single meal, every day, these food laws came into play and reminded them that they were to be set apart as holy every day.

Of course, these food laws don't apply to us today because when Jesus came, he showed us what really makes us unclean and not the ceremonial, but the moral.

[24 : 04] We heard that in our second reading from Mark chapter 7, didn't we? It's something that comes into us like food that makes us unclean. And in saying this, Jesus declared all food cleans. Rather, it's what comes out of us that makes us unclean or defiles us.

Those evil thoughts, as he lists there. At the bottom, all these evil come from inside and defile a person, makes us unclean.

And it's no longer washing our clothes or taking a dustpan and broom sweeping that makes us clean. Rather, it's by being spiritually washed by the blood of Christ when we believe in him.

That's what makes us clean. As we read elsewhere in the Bible, we were washed clean. We were sanctified, made holy. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God.

And it's that spirit who now reminds us to keep living those holy lives. And so those food laws don't apply to us today. But those three related principles do.

[25:07] We're still to remember that we have been made holy. That God has chosen us from among all the people in the world to be his special possession.

And that's what Peter says in that verse we've seen before. You are a chosen people from among every people in the world. A holy nation as God's special possession.

We've been chosen from the nations and for him that we may declare his praises. Live for him. Do you know this is who you are?

That God has made you holy. Set you apart from the world to be his special people. People are knocking Christians more and more, whether it's social media or laws or whatever it is.

And so we can start to think and believe the lie that we are worthless. But to God, we are most worthwhile. We are his special possession.

[26:09] He has made us holy from all the world. But to live for him. Do you know this is your purpose in life? To live for God.

We've been made holy already from the world for God. And second, we're to keep being holy. Set apart this time as different to the world.

And like God instead. Again, not by what we eat, but how we live. As Peter says earlier, As obedient children. Do not conform to the evil desires you used to have.

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. Because it's written in Leviticus. Be holy because I am holy. If people look at your lives, will they see that you are different to the world?

Will they see that you are like God? In terms of his character? In the way we speak? How we behave? What we watch?

[27:10] Where we go? If people look at our character, will they see some of God's character? Or are our values set apart as different to the world and like God's values instead?

Are our priorities different to the world's priorities and like God's priorities instead? Are our desires different to the world's desires and like God's desires instead?

This is what it means to be holy like God who is holy. And last, the third thing, again we can see this is meant to be an all of life thing, can't we?

It's not just a Sunday thing, it's an everyday thing. The good news is it's getting easier to stand out as different to the world, or sort of. As our world moves further from God and his values, it's becoming easier to stand out.

You say to someone at work these days, you go to church, oh, you still do that? Are you kidding? Oh, wow. It makes you stand out different like that, doesn't it? But I also say, sort of, because at the same time it's becoming harder.

[28:18] That is, there is more pressure on us not to conform to God's values in his word, but the world's values in our society. And most of us don't like standing out as different, do we?

It's safer to fit in, isn't it? But we have been chosen by God from the world, washed clean by Christ's blood, born into his family, to be different as his holy people.

One of the, an old romantic kids movie that we have at home is called What a Girl Wants, and it's the story of, she wants her father, she wants to meet her father. So she goes on this search looking for her father, and along the way she meets a boy, of course, who takes her on a date on a lake.

And then comes one of the corniest lines I've ever heard. Take a listen. You know what I still don't get?

Why are you trying so hard to fit in when you're born to stand out? Oh, it's PG, can't see it.

[29 : 49] And the point is, we have been chosen by God from the world, washed clean by his blood, born into his family, born to be his holy people, born to stand out.

Let's pray that God would help us do so. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we pray that you would help us not to be unclean by following the desires, the evil desires that come out from our sinful nature, but to be holy because you are holy.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.