

March 4

Leviticus 11

In today's accelerator the big idea could be put into two words: "Clean and Unclean." Or "helpful and Harmful". In the past couple of days we've reflected on the subsequent chapters of the one we are studying today, chapter 11 of Leviticus.

Throughout the book of Leviticus it seems that God goes through great pains to communicate to his people his desire that they be holy and set apart, as I've said in previous accelerators. Today we consider God's commands for the eating and touching of animals, and carcasses and how it relates to the holiness of his people.

There are 3 primary views for the regulations regarding these dietary laws were given: the 'cultic' view, the 'hygienic' view and the 'symbolic' view. While I think it is likely a bit of all three the symbolic view seems to make the most sense to me if you consider the upcoming chapters and God's desire for his people to be distinct from the peoples that lived around them. These laws were teaching the Israelites to "shun whatever was unclean" in order to appreciate what is clean.¹ Notice how many times the word unclean is used (34) and the word abomination (10) is used to describe how God feels about it. We should learn to feel the same way toward what would cause us to be "defiled" and unable to engage with and worship God. Either way you look at it, cultic, hygienic, or symbolic, the laws are communicating what is helpful and what is harmful: helpful or harmful to your distinction as set apart as God's people, to your health and wellbeing, and to your relationship with God.

Now there are essentially three statuses one could be in: a) unclean, b) clean or c) holy. Clean is the normal state of things. The way things ought to be. A clean thing can become unclean by coming in contact with that which is also unclean. But a clean thing is not in itself holy. Being clean is, however a prerequisite for becoming or being holy. You cannot go from being unclean to being holy, you must be washed first – made clean – then you can be made holy (set apart unto God). (Consider Hebrews 9:22; Revelation 7:14; 12:11). Also consider how Jesus told Peter that "unless I wash you, you can have no part with me." You must be made clean. According to the scriptures you cannot be made clean, truly clean apart from the shed blood of Christ.

The purpose for the 'clean'/'unclean' laws: They teach his people to be discerning in matters of holiness, and what would defile them. If you want to lose weight (for health purposes of course), you would not only want to know what would help you maintain the appropriate weight, but what foods help you pack on the pounds. In the same way the dietary laws are teaching God's people discernment in matters of holiness.

Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Holy* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), 46.

The first sin was to exchange what God had said to be true for what God's enemy has said to be true. This is our greatest temptation: to exchange what the Creator God has said for what creation deems to be good and right. The laws of Moses in general the dietary laws in particular are a call to remember who God is and what he has done for his people.

In giving his law to his people the LORD frequently used the Exodus account to remind them they were redeemed by the Lord out of Egypt (19:36; 22:31–33; 25:38, 42, 55; 26:13, 45) and should glorify Him with their bodies. Out of affection for what he has done for them they ought to obey him who saved them. Ephesians 4:1 (ESV) I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

Now, a couple of facts: one historical and one theological.

- 1) God only gave these laws to Israel and not to other nations. In a previous accelerator I mentioned that Israel was a theocracy and everything they did communicated something about the God they worshipped. Even what they were allowed to eat and touch!
- 2) Jesus set aside these regulations: Consider Col 2:14; Mark 2:7FF; Acts 10:9-16 and 1 Cor 8:8.

Discernment is the art of showing insight and understanding. God's desire is for his people to show insight and understanding of who He is and what pleases Him. By obeying his commands we strengthen our muscles of discernment, learning what pleases and displeases him. Romans 12:1-3 says it well: Be transformed by the renewing of your mind...then you will be able to test and approve the will of God. His good, perfect and pleasing will. By obeying God and having his laws (scripture) fill and transform your mind, you will be able to test and approve (discern) what is helpful to your faith and your life.

Application:

Consider what is "clean" and "unclean" in your life. What is helpful and not harmful? Consider the following:

- 1) Your diet
- 2) Your entertainment choices
- 3) Your budget (how you spend your money)
- 4) How you spend your time

If you are a head of household (a mom or a dad), consider how you are training and preparing your children to be discerning adults who able to "test and approve what God's will is...his good, perfect and pleasing will."