

Leviticus 11 | Sunday May 4, 2025

As the book of Leviticus started God has been explaining to the Israelites how to worship Him with the tabernacle. This culminated with the priest being set aside for service and followed by the failure of Nadab and Abihu. As God restored Aaron, He gave Him an important role.

Leviticus 10:8; 10-11 ESV

(8) And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying,

(10) **You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean,**

(11) and **you are to teach the people** of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them by Moses.”

God wants Aaron to explain to the Israelites the difference between what is holy and set aside to God and what is common. He also wants Aaron to teach them what is unclean and what is clean. This introduces the theme for the next 5 chapters. God is going to teach Aaron about these categories and apply theme to a variety of specific life situations. These 5 chapters go into detail of the differences of what is holy, common, clean, and unclean. They also explain how something, or someone goes from one category to the next. **These chapters will show how often we all become unclean.** As challenging, odd, and impossible some of these commands will seem God in His grace has all these chapters culminate in chapter 16 with the day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16:16 ESV

(16) Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, **because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins.** And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, **which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.**

On the day of Atonement once a year **all of the sins of Israel are dealt with.** After we study these next 5 chapters hopefully we will understand their need and our need for the day of atonement. No one can read the next 5 chapters and imagine never becoming unclean. As people we are sinners and we are also unclean. God was dwelling in their presence and gave a way to restore fellowship and restore cleanliness. These commands are hard to understand but the context helps. **God is defining all the things He is going to make atonement for.** This law was not intended to teach Israel how to be right with God or earn His righteousness. **It was to show their need for His atonement.**

Romans 3:20 ESV

(20) For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, **since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**

I am amazed at how often the purpose of the law is misunderstood today. These chapters show our sin and uncleanness which exposes our need for Jesus.

Leviticus 11:1-47 ESV

(1) And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, (2) “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, These **are the living things that you may eat** among all the animals that are on the earth. (3) Whatever **parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud,** among the animals, **you may eat.** (4) Nevertheless, among those that chew the cud

or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. (5) And the rock badger, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. (6) And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. (7) And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. (8) You shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall not touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you. (9) **“These you may eat, of all that are in the waters.** Everything in the waters that **has fins and scales**, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. (10) But anything in the seas or the rivers that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is detestable to you. (11) **You shall regard them as detestable;** you shall not eat any of their flesh, and you shall detest their carcasses. (12) Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you. (13) **“And these you shall detest among the birds;** they shall not be eaten; they are detestable: the eagle, the bearded vulture, the black vulture, (14) the kite, the falcon of any kind, (15) every raven of any kind, (16) the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind, (17) the little owl, the cormorant, the short-eared owl, (18) the barn owl, the tawny owl, the carrion vulture, (19) the stork, the heron of any kind, the hoopoe, and the bat. (20) “All winged insects that go on all fours **are detestable to you.** (21) Yet among the winged insects that go on all fours **you may eat** those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to hop on the ground. (22) Of them you may eat: the locust of any kind, the bald locust of any kind, the cricket of any kind, and the grasshopper of any kind. (23) But all other winged insects that have four feet are detestable to you. (24) “And by these you shall become unclean. Whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean until the evening, (25) and whoever carries any part of their carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. (26) Every animal that parts the hoof but is not cloven-footed or does not chew the cud is unclean to you. Everyone who touches them shall be unclean. (27) **And all that walk on their paws,** among the animals that go on all fours, **are unclean to you.** Whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean until the evening, (28) and he who carries their carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening; they are unclean to you. (29) “And these are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm on the ground: the mole rat, the mouse, the great lizard of any kind, (30) the gecko, the monitor lizard, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. (31) These are unclean to you among all that swarm. Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening. (32) And anything on which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether it is an article of wood or a garment or a skin or a sack, any article that is used for any purpose. It must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening; then it shall be clean. (33) And if any of them falls into any earthenware vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break it. (34) Any food in it that could be eaten, on which water comes, shall be unclean. And all drink that could be drunk from every such vessel shall be unclean. (35) And everything on which any part of their carcass falls shall be unclean. Whether oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces. They are unclean and shall remain unclean for you. (36) Nevertheless, a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, but whoever touches a carcass in them shall be unclean. (37) And if any part of their carcass falls upon any seed grain that is to be sown, it is clean, (38) but if water is put on the seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean to you. (39) “And if any animal which you may eat dies, whoever touches its carcass shall be unclean

until the evening, (40) and whoever eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. And whoever carries the carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. (41) “Every swarming thing that swarms on the ground is detestable; it shall not be eaten. (42) Whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, any swarming thing that swarms on the ground, you shall not eat, for they are detestable. (43) You shall not make yourselves detestable with any swarming thing that swarms, and you shall not defile yourselves with them, and become unclean through them. (44) **For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.** You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. (45) For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. **You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.**” (46) This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground, (47) **to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean** and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.

God separates all animals into three categories, land animals, water animals, and flying animals which includes both birds and insects. In each category God gives the standard for what is a clean animal and what is unclean. A lot of animals are mentioned and yet with the looseness of Hebrew **only about 40% of them can be identified with accuracy.** This is not the first place that God instructed humanity on what we are allowed to eat and not eat. God is the creator of all and it is His right to declare what is meant for food.

Genesis 1:29-30 ESV

(29) And God said, “Behold, I have given you **every plant** yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and **every tree** with seed in its fruit. **You shall have them for food.**
(30) And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, **I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.**

In the Garden of Eden, God gives humanity and the animal kingdom the right to eat from all fruits and vegetables. **It is interesting to note that in these commands in Leviticus there are no unclean fruits or vegetables.** This is unlike the Egyptian dietary laws that declared some vegetables as unclean. At this point no meat was to be eaten by animals or humanity. This did not change until after Noah’s ark.

Genesis 9:1-4 ESV

(1) And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
(2) **The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast** of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.
(3) **Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.** (4) But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

At this point after the flood God put the fear of humanity into animals. He also gave us the right to eat any moving thing. We are the only creation made in the image of God and **so everything else**

is allowed to be eaten. The one command is that the animal must die first. We are not to eat things that are alive and still have their blood in them. By in large society as a whole follows this. With some unique expectations of various seafood and insects the world does not eat living things. Now God gives **unique** instructions to His people as He dwells in their midst.

Leviticus 11:3; 27 ESV

(3) Whatever **parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud**, among the animals, **you may eat.**

(27) **And all that walk on their paws**, among the animals that go on all fours, **are unclean to you.** Whoever touches their carcass shall be unclean until the evening,

There are clean animals that they are allowed to eat and unclean animals they are not to eat. For land animals the distinction is straightforward. **If an animal parts the hoof, and chews the cud then it is clean.** If it does neither or only one of these then it is unclean. For example, the camel chews the cud but does not have a parted hoof so it is unclean. The pig has a parted hoof but does not chew the cud, so it is unclean. The cow, goat, and sheep fit both categories and are considered clean. Anything with a paw is unclean, this would include bears and lions. God gives other qualifications for fish, birds and insects.

Leviticus 11:9,13,20-21 ESV

(9) **“These you may eat, of all that are in the waters.** Everything in the waters that **has fins and scales**, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat.

(13) **“And these you shall detest among the birds;** they shall not be eaten; they are detestable: the eagle, the bearded vulture, the black vulture,

(20) **“All winged insects** that go on all fours **are detestable to you.**

(21) Yet among the **winged insects** that go on all fours **you may eat** those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to **hop on the ground.**

Fish with both fins and scales are considered clean. For example, catfish are unclean because they do not have scales. All Birds of prey that eat flesh are considered unclean. Flying insects are unclean but hopping insects are clean. This means John the Baptist’s diet of locust was considered clean. **Our immediate question is why?** Why would these distinctions make an animal unclean or clean? At the end of the chapter God is very clear in showing His purpose for these commandments but the why question remains.

Over time many reasons have been given. Some think these are **arbitrary.** God demanding obedience not based on anything real. This would violate His loving caring nature. Some think the unclean animals are forbidden because of their ties to **cult worship** in other nations. In Mesopotamia pigs were sacrificed to demons. This would not account for the cow being clean when they were used in many pagan sacrifices. For others a **symbolic meaning** is looked for, but the lion being unclean and Jesus being called the lion from the tribe of Judah makes this difficult. Others emphasize **the health benefits** and on the whole the unclean animals tend to have more diseases and parasites than the clean animals. This most likely is a part of the answer. For Israel over time there have been sicknesses and disease that this diet has helped prevent and generally the Jews have a longer life expectancy than the neighboring gentiles. Yet this is not the whole picture, either.

Mark 7:18-23 ESV

(18) And He said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever **goes into a person from outside cannot defile him**, (19) since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” **(Thus He declared all foods clean.)**

(20) And He said, “**What comes out of a person is what defiles him.**

(21) For from within, **out of the heart of man**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,

(22) coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

(23) All these evil things come from within, and **they defile a person.**”

Jesus is very clear that it is sin that comes from within our own hearts that defile us. It is not food from the outside that defiles us. Mark emphasizes Jesus teaching by pointing out that this declared all foods to be clean. As believers we do not have to follow these commands. Jesus declared all to be clean. **If health was the main reason, then why would God not care about the health of Christians in the first century?**

To better understand the “why” of these categories it is important to realize **unclean is not the same as sin**. Cleanliness and uncleanness better points to **wholeness/normalcy** in contrast to the abnormal. Israel had a holy God living in their presence and they were to reflect that holiness, **His wholeness in every aspect of their life. He was asking their diet to reflect what was offered on the altar in an expanded way.** Only clean animals were offered to God. Each grouping of clean animals represents normalcy and wholeness. **God wanted His people to reflect Him.** This can be seen in His purpose for these commandments.

Leviticus 11:44-47 ESV

(44) **For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.** You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground.

(45) **For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.**”

(46) This is the law about beast and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms on the ground,

(47) to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.

God’s intent was for these laws to reflect **the consecration, holiness, being set apart**, of His people Israel. These laws were not what made them set apart. They did not make them holy. Instead these laws were to reflect the truth that God chose them to be His people. **The laws were how to show your separateness not how to be separate in the first place.** They were His people unique from all others and every aspect of their life was to reflect Him. These dietary laws were a mere shadow.

Colossians 2:16-17 ESV

(16) Therefore let no one pass judgment **on you in questions of food and drink**, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

(17) **These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.**

A shadow has no substance and is meant to draw us to the real. These dietary laws were meant to draw Israel and us to the fact that God’s people are unique and are to be set apart and whole. The

Jews were called out from all the gentile nations. No meal was carelessly had. **Each time a distinction between the clean and unclean needed to be carefully followed and it served as a constant reminder that they were distinguished.** It pointed forward to the reality of Jesus; **this privileged distinction as God's people would extend past the Jews.** In Acts 10 God has to convince Peter of this.

Acts 10:12-16; 28, 34-36; 44-45 ESV

(12) **In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.** (13) And there came a voice to him: **“Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”** (14) But Peter said, **“By no means, Lord;** for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” (15) And the voice came to him again a second time, **“What God has made clean, do not call common.”** (16) **This happened three times,** and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

God shows Peter unclean animals and commands Him to eat them. God is declaring the reality, the substance that is found in Jesus and Peter is struggling. It is amazing to see that Peter argues with God three times. After this vision Peter goes to Cornelius' house.

(28) And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, **but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.**

Peter was even uncomfortable entering a gentile house but He now understands God's message to him. **The vision and command was not just about food.** No person is common or unclean.

(34) So Peter opened his mouth and said: **“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,**
(35) but in every nation anyone **who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.**
(36) As for the word that He sent to Israel, **preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all),**

God does not play favorites. The truth of Jesus is for all, because He is Lord of all.

(44) While Peter was still saying these things, **the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.**
(45) And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, **because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.**

It was truly shocking to the Jewish believers that the gentiles could be saved and receive the Holy Spirit. **The reality of the dietary laws pointed to the set apartness of all God's people not just the Jews.** We are set apart in Jesus. We are called to reflect that set apartness. This does not show up in what we eat, but through our lives.

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 ESV

(16) What agreement has the temple of God with idols? **For we are the temple of the living God;** as God said, **“I will make my dwelling among them** and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
(17) Therefore go out from their midst, and **be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,**
(18) and **I will be a Father to you,** and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

(1) Since we have these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit**, bringing **holiness to completion in the fear of God**.

As believers we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. **We are the temple of the living God**.

It is God's will for believers to live set apart from this world. We are saved by the blood of Jesus and then we are to live like we are saved. We are to be in the world and share the love and truth of Jesus. We are to be careful not to start thinking like the world. We are called not to touch any unclean thing, and yet if you walk very long you know we all do. This is why Chapter 7 verse 1 is so encouraging. Since We have the promise that God desires closeness and fellowship with us, we are to cleanse ourselves. **Meaning Paul knows we get dirty in this life**. We end up touching the unclean. We are not to be complacent when we touch the unclean but we should not be surprised by it either. We can come back to Him over and over again and confess our sins and walk fresh with Him.
