

Leviticus 11:1-12

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Date: 03 April 2016

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[0 : 00] Soap is a big business, isn't it? In your house you've got soap gel probably to wash your hands,! Shower gel for your body, shampoo to wash your hair, washing powder to wash your clothes, dishwasher! tablets to wash your dishes, fairy liquid to wash your pans, the list could go on, goodness.

We place a prime, well we place a high premium on being clean. I think it's fair to say that wasn't always the case for myself pre-marriage. Like many of the men here I wince at how unclean I was as a single man. And the house I lived in was since I remember at the end of that first year suddenly realising that bedclothes need to be washed. And it's not always a need isn't it? But we know our culture faces a high premium on cleanliness. Washing and cleaning are important to us. And if they're not to you they should be. And we're going to see this morning that cleaning clean is vital to the people of God. You should have a kind of greeny blue sheet which is going to help you this morning I think. It will make you lazy in your listening. But all the passages that I'm going to refer to are there and it should help you in guiding you through where we're going. We're going to work through these four chapters. So first of all let's notice the cleanliness instructions in chapter 11. They are all about food laws and the chapter gives specific instructions about what foods can and can't be eaten by Israel. There's directions about animals that live on the land, creatures that live on the sea, and birds and insects that fly in the air, others that move on the ground. And the thing to notice are the foods are separated. They are separated into two categories. There is the clean and the unclean. So verses 1 to 23 of the 11, there are the definitions. And then 24 to 42, there's what are the polluting effects of these animals.

So let's look at the permitted and the forbidden animals. They fall into three groups. And there are definite echoes if you know your Bible of Genesis chapter 1. Creatures of the land and the water and the air. And in each group some are allowed that are edible and others are prohibited as inedible. So from the land verses 2 and 3 what is allowed comes? It speaks to the people of Israel saying these are the living things that you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth. Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud among the animals you may eat. Verse 4 to 8 illustrates the animals that don't fall into the kind of split-hoof and chewing curds category. There's the camel, the coney, the rabbit, the pig. They must not be eaten. And their carcasses must not even be touched. Then come verses 9 to 11, the creatures that live in the water. Verse 9. These you may eat, 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. Those that are prohibited, you're not allowed to eat how it goes to 10. They have got no scales, no fins.

[3 : 23] They have scales but no fins. Or they have fins but not scales. It's slightly confusing, isn't it? There's no illustrations given in those verses about the water, about those creatures that live in the water. And let me tell you, jellied eels are out. Okay? Verses 13 to 23 come the flying creatures, the birds and the insects. 13 to 19, there's no principle stated this time.

Rather, there's just a list of detestable birds. Owls are out. And you might notice that the bats are there. You mustn't worry about that. I know that bats are mammals. And the commentators tell us that Moses was not as sophisticated as you are in his classification of animals. And bats were considered birds. Even though they're not birds, they're mammals. From birds to insects, verse 20. And the point in verse 20 is not whether the insect has four legs or more, but whether they are able to walk on all four paws, which is the opposite, isn't it, of walking uprightly.

There are some insects that are allowed. So verse 21 is the principle stated. There are, however, some wind creatures that walk on all fours that you may eat, and they have jointed legs, hopping on the ground. Verse 22 gives you some illustrations. So, you would be able to eat curried locusts and fried grasshoppers. They are both allowed. In fact, if you've got a hungry yeti in Ealing, they're

probably somewhere in that restaurant. So verse 24, you move from the list of the animals to their polluting effect. Let me draw some general principles here.

First of all, dead animals pollute. So touching the carcass, in verse 24, again verse 27, verse 29, all make the same point. When the animal is alive, there isn't that in this transfer of uncleanness. But you must not touch the carcass. And second, if an animal has not been killed in the right way, well then, that becomes unclean on death. So look at verse 39. And if any animal which you eat dies, whoever touches its carcass shall be unclean until the evening. The point is made again, there in verse 24, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 38, 40. They're written down for that. And they all make the same point. But it is worth noting that the effects of touching that animal is less significant than the other things that make someone unclean. We'll see that later on. And the big question in chapter 11 is why, isn't it? Why? Why are some things clean and other things unclean? Why could the Israelite eat beef casserole but not rabbit stew? Why could a Jew eat a donna kebab but not eat a bacon sandwich? And then we say to Jewish and Christian theologians, I've debated that for 2,000 years, and I think there is no consensus. So some want to say health care is the reason.

[6:46] Some say the Lord gave the rules for the welfare of Israel. And there's no doubt there is some benefit to these rules. If a dead mouse falls into your roast dinner, it is better, isn't it, I think, to throw it away than keep eating it and cooking it. But that doesn't fully explain the food laws.

Because when you come to the New Testament, you see that God, in the coming of Jesus, permits these foods. You are allowed a bacon sandwich. You are allowed rabbit stew. And so if these laws are primarily about health care, well, doesn't the Lord Jesus care about your health?

The second option is that these forbidden animals, they are used as pagan sacrificial animals in the land of Canaan. And so these laws are there that they would stop Israel being tempted to pagan worship. And again, I think that's flimsy. As far as I know, only the pig has been discovered as being used in Canaan. Third, this is a favourite, is that these clean animals, they are the most natural ones for their class. So land animals have hooves with which to run, and fish have scales and fins with which to swim. And birds have wings to fly, and two legs to walk. And so they are the most natural within their class. And the other animals, well, they don't have those things. They are less natural. So fish that don't have fins and scales, that's unnatural, so they're unclean. Or insects that fly, but have many legs, they are unclean. I think that's unconvincing. Because in Genesis 1 and 2, did not God create all these animals and declare of them that they were very good. It can't be that somehow a rabbit or a pig is a more unnatural animal than a cow or a sheep. So why these laws? And I think the most obvious answer is the simplest answer. That these animals are clean and unclean because God says so. That is, trying to discover some zoological reason. Well, it's a wild goose chase. I think these animals are clean and unclean just because God says they are clean and unclean. In the same way, in the Garden of Eden, why was there one tree that was declared to be sinful if you eat of its fruit? Why? Why was there that one fruit in which they weren't allowed to eat? Well,

I think it is because God says so. It's not like the poisoned apple is snow white and sand of oats. They would die in the Garden of Eden because God said that it was wrong. And God is the one who decided, and I think here, that Israel are going to be given a land by God and they are being given a rule by God which they are just to obey because God has given them that rule. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with a pig, is there? Or a rabbit? Or a weasel?

Or makes them unclean as God says so. So rules about food. These are those which are external to mankind, don't they? We take food into ourselves from the external. And they make a man or woman unclean according to Leviticus 11. That's the first category. The first category of uncleanness is people become unclean by breaking God's rule. They become unclean by breaking God's rule.

[10:37] And from chapter 12 onwards, the chapters that deal with the next thing tell us that mankind is unclean just because humankind is unclean. He's unclean not by what goes into the body, but unclean in his very body itself. Now we don't have time for the details, but in chapter 12 a woman is considered unclean after childbirth. And after giving birth to a son for seven days, she is unclean. And later in chapter 15 we're told that anyone who touches her is made unclean too in that period of time. She remains unclean herself for thirty-three days. If she has a daughter, that period is doubled. No one can touch her for fourteen days. And she herself is unclean for sixty-six days. Can I say that there are a lot of wacky theories out there as to why a woman is unclean for longer when she gives birth to a girl as opposed to giving birth to a boy? And if you are a feminist here this

morning, I will pad up and you can come see me later and I'll gladly discuss it with you. I would want to say this, when women give birth to a girl, they bleed for slightly longer than after they've given birth to boys.

I asked the medics on that. However, my suspicion is I don't think Moses knew that when he wrote Leviticus. What we do know is that the woman can be restored after uncleanness through the offering of a burnt offering in verse 6. And she's poor through a cheaper means in verse 8. Food taken in from the external. Then childbirth is the first thing that comes out of you that makes you unclean. Chapter 13. Come skin diseases. And forty-six verses are taken up with what someone should do if they develop spots. The authorised version, if you're familiar with that, I talk about leprosy. I don't think that's accurate. I think the ESV is right to call it more generally skin diseases. Chapter 13 in verse 2. When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, or an eruption, or a spot, and it turns into a case of leprosy disease on the skin of his body, then she can be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons, the priest. The priest examines you, and he looks at the sore on the skin. And if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears to be more than skin deep, it is an infectious skin disease. Well what happens in verse 4? The priest runs a sick note. And so when the priest has done the examination, and the sport is like this in verse 4, what does the priest do? He puts the infected person in isolation. And so for seven days, he's in isolation. On the seventh day, the priest examines him again, and if the sore is unchanged, and there's not spread to the skin, he's to keep in isolation for another seven days. And on the seventh day, the priest is examining him again, and if the sore has faded and not spread on the skin, he pronounces him clean. If he's only a rash, the man and woman must wash their clothes and they will be clean again.

That is the pattern. And that happens for all skin conditions, from spots to baldness. And so can I say, if you were a teenager in Israel, what a massive problem period must have been. Can you imagine when the teenage spots started appearing every day down to Aaron the priest? All that time in isolation. Every time a zit appeared on your forehead, you weren't able to go to school. Well, if you read into chapter 14, we won't read it, but once the priest has declared you clean, it tells you that you would have to offer a sacrifice to be reinstated as clean. There is food which comes into you, and there is what comes out of you, childbirth and skin diseases. And the fourth category has got to do with clothing and mildew. That's the second half of chapter 13.

Any sign of mildew on the clothes, and the garment goes to the priest. And for seven days, it is isolated. If the mildew spreads, the garment must be burned. If it doesn't, it must be washed and given another seven days. And if the mildew hasn't faded, the garment must be burned. If it has faded, the mouldy part must be cut out and it will be patched up.

[15 : 10] And so Israel wore patched up jeans long before it was in vogue in the 1980s. The second half of chapter 17 is mildew on clothes. The second half of chapter 14 is what do you do if you find mildew in your house?

So if your house is anything like mine, you go into the bathroom, and in the corners, there are out there those little tiny dark spots.

And again, there are sacrifices that need to be offered. For once you've done the cleansing, work needed to be done to be declared clean. The third and final category, which links closely with childbirth and skin diseases, is chapter 15, and it is bodily discharges.

Now, I will not, I was spaying the embarrassment of reading Leviticus 15. It is the ultimate embarrassment for teenagers. Here, if they're taking a youth group, get them to read Leviticus chapter 15. There are four sections, two for men, and two for women.

And they are all to do with human genitalia. The two for men deal with long-term discharges. And then the short-term discharges, they are associated with sex.

[16 : 28] And the same pattern is repeated for women. There are long-term discharges, and the short-term discharges they are associated with menstruation. And in each case, the person becomes unclean, as does any clothing or bedding that they touched with these bodily discharges.

The person remains unclean for every day there is in his church. And for a woman, it is for seven days after a period begins. And the clothes and the bed linen remain unclean until they are washed. And as with all the other situations, the person must offer sacrifices to God after they become clean again. These are the instructions. And the right way through which we are meant to notice that God is concerned that uncleanness does not spread.

Now at one level, you read these chapters, and our immediate reaction is, what a carry-on. What a palaver.

And that is the right reaction. And so I think we move from the instructions to the purpose. At one level, the purpose is very straightforward.

[17 : 43] And it makes a very, very simple thought point. The point is this. Israel becomes unclean by what they do, but also by who they are. In the food laws, Israel makes themselves unclean by disobeying God's word.

By eating the wrong animals or touching them. But in verse 12 to 14, Israel becomes unclean just actually by being human. Because at one level, don't you think it's a bit unfair?

Don't you think it's a bit unfair that a woman is unclean all through while she's bleeding in her menstrual cycle? Didn't God make women to have a menstrual cycle?

Isn't that part of God's good creation? So why should God declare that you women are unclean when you're having your period? Isn't that unfair?

Why should a woman be unclean when a woman has a baby? Isn't having a baby the most natural thing for a woman to do? It's a normal part of creation, isn't it?

[18 : 54] Why does the Lord declare those things as unclean? And I think it is most likely to make the point that uncleanness is not just about what we take into our bodies.

But uncleanness is just that state. Actually, you'll know that Jesus says pretty much exactly the same thing in Mark chapter 7. But it's not actually what goes into the body that makes us unclean. It is what comes out. Now I think that these laws are illustrative for Israel to make the point that we, you and I, are just unclean.

In and of ourselves, people living in a fallen world, we cannot just get clean by washing ourselves. The Bible teaches that you and I are fundamentally unclean. But what was the purpose of the laws beyond telling us that?

[19 : 55] Well, there are two big ones mentioned at the beginning and the end of the cleanliness section. First, in chapter 11, at the end of the food laws. Can you look at chapter 11, verse 43? Chapter 11, verse 43.

You shall not make for yourselves, you shall not make yourselves intestinal with any swarming thing that swarms. And you shall not define yourself with it and become unclean through them. And then, on to verses 44 and 45.

You are unclean by what you do. But then, verses 44 and 45. For I am the Lord your God.

Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am holy. You shall not define yourself with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground.

Verse 45 again. 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. Do you notice that command is sandwiched in between, isn't it? Verses 44 and 45.

Twice God says to his people, you are to be holy for I am holy. In other words, the purpose of the food laws is this. Is that Israel will be separate and distinct. They'll be separate and distinct because their God is the only God that brought them out of slavery in Egypt.

[21 : 11] And that God who did that is holy and he is separate and he is distinct. The God of the Bible is a holy God. He's set apart.

He's completely separate. He's completely pure. He's completely right. And he wants Israel to be distinctly his people. And if you know when the Lord God brings the people out of Israel in Mount Sinai, you may know that in Exodus 19, the Lord God declares his purpose for Israel.

He says, now obey me completely. Keep my covenant. If you do, then out of all the nations, you will be my special treasure. The whole earth is mine, but you will be a kingdom of priests to serve me.

You will be my holy nation. That is what you must tell the Israelites. In other words, they are to be a kingdom of priests. Not necessarily every individual we know, don't we? Only the heir and his sons. But you are a people who are a priesthood, a holy nation. Your job is to demonstrate, to manifest what God is like to the world. Later on, it's described as a light to the nations.

[22 : 14] The nations were to look to Israel and see that Israel was different. And so every day, every time Israel sat down for Saturday lunch and they had their roast dinner, two things would be said to them.

We are different, and the Lord has chosen us. We are different. We are his treasured possession. God has chosen us.

Every meal, therefore, was a visual aid of how precious and treasured they were to God. We are different. And every time they sat down for their lunch, they would be reminded of their responsibilities to be different to the world around them, so that they would be able to reflect that God is a holy God to the world around them.

That is what Israel was to be like. So the second purpose comes up at the end of chapter 15, right at the end of the section. Can you show that? Chapter 15, verse 31. On the cleanliness laws.

Chapter 15, verse 31. Thus, you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness, by defiling my tabernacle, the place where I dwell, that is in their midst.

[23 : 25] In other words, the issue that is going on is if Israel is just sinful because of who they are and what they do, how is it going to be possible for God to dwell among them?

If they are sinful by what they do and simply by who they are, how is it possible for God, a holy God, to dwell amongst them in the middle of the tabernacle?

Well, the answer is only if they are made clean. And therefore, with childbirth, with skin diseases, with mildew on your clothes and in your home, and with bodily gesticologies, which they are to illustrate in and of itself, you are not clean.

They are given these laws and these sacrifices. They are to undergo them once they discover that they are unclean. They are to go through and sacrifice.

They are to go through all this rigmarole that the holy presence of God symbolized in the dwelling place of the tabernacle, which later will become the temple, that he could dwell amongst them.

[24 : 32] And they can see how is it possible, or how would it be possible, for a holy God to dwell amongst the unclean people only if the unclean people are made clean.

Does that make sense? So what's it going to do with this? It seems so remote, doesn't it, when you read these chapters. What is its relevance?

Well, I guess that you know that the New Testament does not bind us to any of the laws in Leviticus 11-15. And can I say, you should be jolly well relieved of that, shouldn't you?

Just going backwards from chapter 15, ladies, aren't you glad that you don't have to sacrifice two doves every 28 days? Isn't that a relief to us? How many of you girls have killed a dove in your life? Anyone? I thought there might be some Americans that would have shot birds in peace. How many of you would be up for killing a dove? Joan, what?

[25 : 47] But every time you've had your period, after seven days of starving, you've got to sacrifice a dove. What a gory business. It does not just make you want to say, well, thank you, Jesus, I don't have to do that.

How many of you are in spots in your life? Aren't you glad you haven't got to go through the rigmarole of going to the priest yourself, examining yourself, getting examined, isolating yourself for seven days, going back to the priest, another period of isolation.

What a rigmarole. Because God wants us to be able to understand, they make themselves unclean, and they are unclean. And so how are you and I made clean?

We are made clean, aren't we? Not by washing ourselves on the outside. What's the great mistake in the New Testament? The kind of religious leaders, the churchgoers of Jesus' day, do you remember they came and they criticized Jesus in Mark Chapel 7?

They say, Jesus, you don't go through the kind of whole ceremonial washing of the hands. The religious establishment established a whole series of traditions, and they thought that if you wash the outside of things, that is what made you clean.

[27 : 05] And they hadn't really understood the significance of Leviticus 7-15, that it's actually not what you do that makes you unclean, but it's who you are. So in Mark Chapel 7 and verse 1, the Pharisees gather around Jesus, the Son of the Son of the teachers of the Lord, and all of them had come from Jerusalem.

And they saw that some of his disciples, they ate food with unclean hands, that means they were not washed. And the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, to make them clean.

That's what the elders teach. And when they came from the market, they do not eat unless they wash, and they follow many of the teachers. For example, they wash cups and pitchers and cattles in a special way.

So the Pharisees and the teachers, they'll no question Jesus, why don't your disciples live by what the elders teach? Why do they eat food with unclean hands? And he replied, Isaiah was right, he prophesied about you, people who pretend to be good.

He said, these people honour me with what they say, but their hearts are far from me. He goes on in verse 14, and again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, listen to me, everyone understand this, nothing outside of a person can make himself unclean by going into them.

[28 : 20] It's what comes out of them that makes themselves unclean. Jesus explains in verse 20, what comes out of a person is what makes them unclean. Evil thoughts come from the inside, from a person's heart.

So the sexual sins, and stealing, and murder, and adultery, and greed, and hatred, and cheating, they come from a person's heart too. So the desires that are not pure, and wanting what belongs to others, and so to telling lies about others, and being proud, and being foolish.

All these things come from inside a person and make them unclean. You see, are you all, all of us, we're all somewhere in Mark 7, aren't we? It's a catch-all list.

Every single one of us is in Mark 7. We are all unclean. Unclean. We are meant to have twigged what it seems that Israel religions are not twigged, that the illustrations in the law of Leviticus 11 and 15 were meant to make them realise that what they did, and who they were, was what made them unclean.

And so Jesus spells it out for you. And he says, it's what comes out of your heart that makes you unclean. And of course in doing so he declares all foods clean.

[29 : 40] So how are we made clean? How are you made clean? If today we are unclean by what we do, and what comes out of our hearts, how can we be made clean from that?

And the answer is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ that makes us clean. But what can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

There is a fountain filled with blood torn from Emmanuel's veins, scrolled in us. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

Let me give you two texts. The first text is Hebrews 10, verse 1. For since the law was just the shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities, it can never by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year make perfect those who draw near.

Otherwise they would not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers having once been cleansed. The implication is this. The death of Jesus is what cleanses us once and for all.

[30 : 57] The death of the Lord Jesus has cleansed you from within. And so if you have believed and trusted in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are clean. And that is how God now views you as clean people.

2 Peter chapter 1 and verse 9, he was cleansed from his former sins. Our assurance, a pardon that we heard earlier on in the service, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin from John 1.

The point is, we have been made clean. And what therefore happens? Well, two things. Two things happen. The same two things that were meant to happen in the book of Leviticus.

First, a holy God can dwell within us. A holy God can dwell within us. Have you ever thought how it is possible for God, by his Holy Spirit, to live inside you?

To live inside you who are completely mucked up and screwed up and messed up and unclean. It is because Jesus has cleansed you.

[32 : 08] And therefore, God's Holy Spirit can dwell within you. A holy God who is too pure to even look, look on evil, can live within you.

And of course, the New Testament teaches us that he lives amongst us corporately as the people of God, as the church. But he does live within us individually. So Paul says in 1 Corinthians, do you not know that your bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit?

And that can only be because you've been made clean by the blood of Jesus, by the death of Jesus. But the second big purpose is you've been made clean to do what?

Well, the New Testament takes the same language. If you look at your sheet, there's 1 Peter chapter 1. And you'll notice the same language of Leviticus 11, 44 and 45 is picked up by Peter in chapter 1 and verse 15.

But as he who calls you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, you shall be holy for I am holy. Why are we now to be holy?

[33 : 20] Then on chapter 2, listen to this outrageous language Peter uses to describe us to the church. But you are a chosen race. You, the people of God, are a royal priesthood.

You, the church of the young and IPC, are holy nation. A people for his own possession. And what Peter does is he takes the church from Exodus 19 of Israel being constituted as a nation and he says that is now us.

We are now the holy nation. We are now the royal priesthood. We are now the ones who are given the task of mediating what God is like to the world. And how do we do that? Well, that is by living holy lives.

We are called to live differently from the world we are placed in. And we will see the act of that it is not in the same way as Israel hint. We do not show that we are different not by eating pork or rabbit. We will show ourselves as different to the world by living fundamentally in a different way. And it is our call to be holy. we are to be different in all that we do.

[34 : 29] Because we are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are being made clean from the inside. And it is meant to make us fundamentally the people who represent God to the world.

And yet in my experience more often than not we are different from the world where we could be the same and where the same is the world where we ought to be different.

And the purpose of us being holy is that the world might see. It is so that the world according to 1 Peter 2 Beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of his visitation. That is the purpose.

You are free to eat pork. You are free to eat rabbit stew. You do not have to offer a sacrifice when your period is ended. Jesus is the one who has made you clean from the inside but he has made us clean so that those two things from Leviticus could be true.

[35 : 37] So that a holy God could dwell on us. And he does so by his Holy Spirit within us and among us and one day we will dwell with him for all of Jesus. And he has made us clean so that we can live with him or more accurately he can live within us and he has made us clean so that we will be a holy people.

So that we will demonstrate that the God whom we serve is a holy God who is different to all the other gods of the world. and we will demonstrate what God is like to our world.

And we will live such light among our pagan friends that they will see that we are different. And if nothing else it will cause our friends to ask questions and it will give us an opportunity to give a reason for the hope that is within us according to 1 Peter 3.15.

You are clean this morning by the Lord Jesus and you are clean so that you can live a holy life so that people can see what our God is like.

You are clean if you have trusted in the Lord Jesus and you have been made clean so that you can live a holy life so that people can see what God is like.

[36 : 55] That's perfect.