

## Distinguishing Between the Clean and Unclean

A few weeks ago we had a very good sermonette that encouraged us to meditate on God's laws and statutes and learn what we can from the principles found within them. What I'd like to do in the sermonette time today is look at one of those laws which we are all very familiar with and explore both the letter and the spirit of this law.

The law that I would like to explore with you today is that of the difference between foods which are clean and those which are unclean. First of all, I'd like for us explore both the letter and the spirit of this law from a health perspective and then after I'd like to explore the broad spiritual principles in the Bible that God wants us to learn in distinguishing between what He considers to be clean and what is unclean.

We are first introduced to the concept of clean and unclean animals in Genesis 7 where Noah is told to take on the Ark two of each unclean animal and seven of each clean animal. Later when the Israelites came out of Egypt and God gave them the laws and statutes He clearly specifies what those clean and unclean animals are. In Leviticus 11:46 we read the following:

"This *is* the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten."

In verse 3 God says that mammals which are clean have to have a divided hoof and must chew the cud. Research has shown that animals which chew the cud have much better digestive processes which screen out impurities that would otherwise be passed on into its flesh and milk. Such animals include cattle, sheep, deer, goats and, oddly enough, the giraffe, of all creatures. There's certainly enough on a giraffe to keep a tribe going for a whole month. Mammals which are unclean include pigs (which are scavengers), rabbits, canines, cats, kangaroos, horses and camels.

In verse 12 the features which distinguish clean water animals are fish that have fins and scales. All other water creatures such as catfish, shark, squid, crabs, lobsters, oysters, prawns, etc. that are mostly scavengers are unclean.

I once heard a story about a feast held many years ago in Hong Kong or China where the minister was very adamant to a chef that there was to be no seafood at a feast dinner only to find that some seafood was brought out to the table. The minister went back to the chef and said, "I thought I told you that there wasn't to be any seafood brought out." Then the Chinese chef replied, "Oh, that not seafood, that come from river." Another feast story I heard was where one of our members wasn't sure about whether a fish being served was clean or not and so they asked the waiter if it had fins and scales. Another member on the next table then piped up and said, "No, it's got snorkels and goggles!"

Deuteronomy 14:11-20 says that all birds are clean except birds of prey, scavengers such as vultures and a few others. Also considered unclean were reptiles, amphibians, spiders and bats. Leviticus 11:20-22 says that all insects are unclean except grasshoppers, crickets and locusts. John the Baptist lived off locusts and wild honey. Apparently the locusts were ground to a cake-like pulp and honey was added. According to Rushdoony in his book "The Institutes of Biblical Law", John the Baptist's flight to the wilderness and surviving off locusts typified the flight of the Jews after the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

The common sense principle behind these laws is that God made some animals for human food while others were for work, for pets, for consuming waste products and for controlling the numbers

of creatures. Eating animals which are unclean put our bodies at risk of disease. Like the Sabbath and Holy Days, obeying this law is another sign identifying God's people. In concluding the details of the clean and unclean animals God says in Leviticus 11:45: "You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."

Question: "If an animal is considered clean does that mean that we can eat every part of that animal?" Well, common sense and biblical principles tell us that the answer is no. Throughout the details of the various sacrifices made to God, the kidneys, the liver and the entrails were always removed first. These parts of the body are part of the excretory system of an animal that God designed to remove toxins and waste products from the body and are not to be eaten.

We've looked at the letter of this law, now what about the spirit of the law? What broader health principles are behind this law? Put simply, the principle is not to consume anything that is harmful to us.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 we read the following: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *which is* in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

Now because our bodies are holy to God we should honour God by looking after our bodies. The main thrust of his argument is not to dishonour God in our bodies by committing fornication or any other immoral sexual act but the principle is broader than that.

The principle here is that we should honour God as we are able to by keeping ourselves healthy and in reasonable shape and not abuse it through such practices as drunkenness, gluttony, smoking and substance abuse. By doing those practices we break the principle of glorifying God in our bodies. Christ's broken body paid the penalty for the times that we break these principles of good health and a point worth thinking about as we draw near to the Passover.

Many of our junk foods, when eaten in sufficient quantity, can be just as bad for our health as eating unclean foods, not to mention practices such as smoking. One time when I was out working delivering pizzas I delivered some pizzas to a couple of Arab guys and one was very adamant about not wanting any ham or pork products on the pizzas. I noticed that both of them were actually smoking like a chimney and I really felt like saying to them, "Don't you think you're going to do more damage to yourself smoking compared to eating ham?" It was obvious that they thought of the law purely as a ceremonial or religious law not realizing it was primarily given as a health law that God gave for our own good. Other things which weren't to be eaten according the laws and statutes that God gave included blood and fat (which leads to heart disease).

The concept of cleanness and uncleanness at a physical or health level was much broader in the Old Testament than just limited to clean and unclean foods. Some other health laws were laws of sanitation designed to keep them clean and free from diseases. Disease, such as leprosy, was considered unclean.

Some of these laws included not touching dead animals and not eating any animal that dies naturally, quickly burying the dead, burying sewerage, quarantine for people with leprosy and contagious diseases, washing oneself after sex or after a woman's monthly period, no sex with a woman during her period, circumcision and getting rid of mildew.

These also rendered someone in ancient Israel ceremonially unclean and unfit to come before God in the tabernacle. The Life Application Bible's commentary says this about the uncleanness associated with sex: "Israel's religion avoided all sexual connotations. By keeping worship and sex entirely separate, God helped the Israelites avoid confusion with pagan rites [which often included immoral sexual acts]". We know that God is not the God of the dead but is the Living God, hence part of the reason why dead things caused uncleanness.

The concept of being clean in the Bible means pure and free from sin or defilement. Words closely connected to being clean are words such as pure or holy. The Hebrew word for clean is *tahor* and it means the absence of impurity, filthiness, defilement, or imperfection. The concept of spiritual cleanness or uncleanness referring to moral purity or defilement is found right throughout the Bible.

In Psalm 24:3-4 David wrote: "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart."

What does it mean to have clean hands? Isaiah talks about sinners who have unclean hands from causing violence to others and taking bribes. James 4:8 speaks about drawing near to God and cleaning our hands from acts of sin. The corollary of that is that our hands should be involved with doing good and helping others whether it's a pat on the back for a job well done, writing cards and letters of encouragement and serving others whether it's setup at church or helping someone to carry a load.

What does it mean to have a clean heart? When David asked God to forgive him of his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah the Hittite he cried out to God and said: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." James wrote something quite interesting about what it means to have a clean heart. In James 4:8 he writes: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded."

Our heart is the seat of our emotions and our motives or why we do what we do. James tells us that those who are double-minded need to purify their hearts. Quite often we want to do what's right but there's also a part of our hearts that wants to continue doing what we know to be wrong. Sometimes it can take quite a while to surrender to God in different areas of our life. To be pure and have a clean heart we need to wholeheartedly WANT to do what's right and not be hypocritical. We are to give it our very best to live up to the high values that we believe in.

In Matthew 15:19 Christ says: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man." Accidentally swallowing some dirt won't contaminate our hearts. Sinful thoughts and sinful words defile a man's heart. In contrast to that Psalm 19:9 says that "the fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring forever."

In the Old Testament we read that the land of Palestine was defiled or made unclean by the sins of the people who lived there. Those in ancient Israel could also be defiled by going to mediums. And we find that demons are frequently called unclean spirits in the New Testament. God greatly chastised Israel for greatly defiling His Sabbaths in Ezekiel 20. He also greatly chastised the priests in Ezekiel 22 for profaning holy things and not making known to the people the difference between the holy and unholy and the clean and unclean – a pattern we have also seen in recent years in the church.

In Isaiah 6:5 the prophet Isaiah said the following when he saw the glory of God on His throne: "Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." What does it mean to have unclean lips? Some sins caused by the words we say include lying, taking God's name in vain, swearing and dirty jokes, gossip and tearing other people down with our words. Conversely those with clean lips are those people who build up others with their words, who regularly look for opportunities to point out others' good points and encourage people with the truth of God's word.

In 2 Corinthians 6:17 God says: "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." The broad spiritual principle here is not to take

anything into our minds and our lives which can damage us. We must try our best not to pollute our minds with spiritual junk food whether it be false doctrines, pornography, humanism and the world's false values such as materialism, pride and sensuality.

We need to take care of what we read, watch and listen to through music, movies and the media. The world is trying to desensitize our minds to the dangers of sin and we can easily become soft on sin in our hearts. I know every now and then when I might be watching a sitcom on TV and I find myself laugh at something and I have to check myself and say "I shouldn't be laughing at that, should I?" I remember another time I was out with friends watching a movie. I had the vaguest of ideas as to what it was about when I went in and towards the end of it I was thinking to myself, "This whole movie is about stealing and the ones doing the stealing are being made out to be the good guys."

The world is trying to contaminate our hearts with its values. Some of these attacks are direct and in our face while others are very subtle and potentially even more dangerous. One thing that I have been astonished with in recent years is how much more provocative the world's dress standards have become, even in just the few short years since I was a teenager. Girls in the church need to be careful not to flow along with those standards and be aware of the impact that they can have on men, even young men in the church. Proverbs 4:23 tells us that we need to keep or guard our hearts with all diligence.

In James 1:27 we read: "Pure and undefiled religion [or clean religion] before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world." Visiting orphans and widows is all about reaching out to others, particularly those in greatest need. Keeping oneself unspotted from the world means avoiding sinful habits.

Some members can often live their lives as if avoiding doing certain wrong things is all that it means to be a christian, not realizing that Christianity is far more than that! Christianity is primarily an OUTGOING way of life - a life of service to others. It's not just about avoiding sins – it's also about reaching out to others, doing good and enriching the lives of other people!

The Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary has this to say in its article about uncleanness: "Unclean things and people can be purified. Temple articles were purified through sprinkling of blood (Lev. 16:19). For those who touched dead bodies, washing with water provided cleansing (Lev. 15:27)...John explained that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from the defilement of sin (1 John 1:7). God fully provides for the cleansing of that which is unclean."

Ephesians 5:26 also talks about Christ cleansing the church "with the washing of water by the word". Sometimes when we have become contaminated with a particular sin it's good to go over and above with reading the Bible and give our minds a deep cleansing with God's word.

The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:2-3: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

In conclusion, God has promised us an incredible future beyond anything we can possibly imagine. Everyone who has this awesome hope will diligently strive to live a pure, clean life and be holy just as God is holy.