

# ***“Our LORD & Ceremonial Purity”***

Leviticus 11-15

March 18, 2018

**INTRO:** (PRAY) Let me ask you a few questions as we begin

- What’s the “toughest teaching” in the Bible?
- Which of Christ’s commands rub you wrong?
- Why do some Christians “*obsess over obedience?*”

***Is there a difference between pharisaical perfectionism & a God-honoring pursuit of Christ-like purity?***

- What was God doing in Lev. 11-15... & **WHY?**

**T/S:** For those who haven’t been with us...

## ➤ **Leviticus 11-15**

- **Ch.11 = *Delicacies*** (eating of living things)
  - *“And the Lord spoke...”*
  - More about *faith vs food...*
- **Ch.12 = *Deliveries*** (child birth)
  - *“And the Lord spoke...”*
  - More about *believing vs babies...*
- **Ch.13-14 = *Diseases*** (leprosy & skin issues)
  - *“And the Lord spoke...”*
  - More about *living vs leprosy...*
- **Ch.15 = *Discharges*** (intimate body fluids)
  - *“And the Lord spoke...”*
  - More *discipleship vs discharges...*

**REVIEW:** Holiness describes God's way  
& declares God's warning!

\*\*\* Christ *provides* that holiness...

\*\*\* Christ *empowers* that holiness!

**BIG IDEA:** How people **come-TO** the Lord... **AND** how  
people **go-FOR** the Lord, **matters!**

*Faithful obedience is the standard,  
invitation, test, witness, & blessing of  
God's grace & holiness AND our love!*

**PREVIEW:**

- A. Faithful-obedience is the set-apart **standard**
- B. Faithful-obedience is the set-apart **invitation**
- C. Faithful-obedience is the set-apart **test**
- D. Faithful-obedience is the set-apart **witness**
- E. Faithful-obedience is the set-apart **blessing!**

*(You'll never know a greater blessing than when you are walking in faithful obedience!)*

**T/S:** *God demands before He delivers!* - JDP

*Ceremonial purity paved the way for Christ-following passion!*

➤ **Leviticus 11:44** *For I am the LORD your  
God. Consecrate/sanctify/set-apart yourselves  
therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. Do not  
defile yourselves...*

- Again... biblical, FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE is the Standard, Invitation, Test, Witness, & the Blessing of BE-ing set-apart & consecrated for God's holy work in you & thru you! - JDP  
by contrast...
- *Nothing defiles like disobedience!* - JDP  
*in fact...*
- *Disobedience embodies defilement!* - JDP

➤ **Leviticus 15:31**     *"You must keep the Israelites separate from things that defile them (a.k.a. make them unclean), so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place/tabernacle, which is among them."*

**Ceremonial purity paved the way for  
Christ-following passion!**

**VIDEO:**     *"Pastor Jeff Durbin"*

**T/S:**     *You see friends... faithful obedience to God's **WORD**,  
God's **WILL**, & God's **WAY** is the greatest work,  
witness, and demonstration of genuine-worship that  
any honest pursuit of Christ-like holiness can offer...  
*ALL for God's glory & ALL by His grace.*  
*Amen & AMEN**

**CLOSE:**     See the genius & grace of God's **wisdom**...  
See the genius & grace of God's **way**...  
See the genius & grace of God's **warning!**

- **God gives us the TRUTH (REALIZE)**
  - He is holy, therefore we are to be holy.
  - We cannot become holy on our own
  - He creates a sacrificial atonement system
  - He supplies the sacrifices/Sacrifice
    - **John 3:3; 16**
    - **John 14:6**
    - **Ephesians 6:10ff; Matthew 7...**
  
- **God gives us the TEST (REPENT)**
  - Obey and be blessed with restoration
  - Disobey and be defiled & damned
    - **John 3:36**
    - **John 14:15**
    - *“He who loses his life for My sake...”*
    - *“Live a life worthy of the Gospel...”*
    - **1 John 2:6**
    - **Luke 14:27**
  
- **God gives us the TIME (REACH)**
  - We know He’s coming soon...
  - He is either **calling** or **sending** everyone...
    - *Seek first the kingdom of God...*
    - **The Great C’s**
    - **Hebrews 11:24**

***“Let us consider how to stir one another up to love & good deeds (or good works).”***

**Let’s Pray!**

**VIDEO:** *“Come To The Alter”*

## RESEARCH Notes:

“I love this picture. Imagine walking in a field and stumbling upon a treasure that is more valuable than anything else you could work for or find in this life. It is more valuable than all you have now or will ever have in the future. You look around and notice that no one else realizes the treasure is here, so you cover it up quickly and walk away, pretending you haven't seen anything. You go into town and begin to sell off all your possessions to have enough money to buy that field. The world thinks you're crazy. “What are you thinking?” your friends and family ask you. You tell them, “I'm buying that field over there.” They look at you in disbelief. “That's a ridiculous investment,” they say. “Why are you giving away everything you have?” You respond, “I have a hunch,” and you smile to yourself as you walk away.”

“So with joy - with joy! - you sell it all, you abandon it all. Why? Because you have found something worth losing everything else for.”

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

How do we interpret/apply the O.T. laws in the N.T. church?

- Think of it like the laws of VT & Maryland...
  - Vermonters are not obligated to MD laws...
  - Some VT laws are duplicated in MD...
  - EVERY valid law is to be enforced!
  - Principles are timeless/without boundaries
  - Apply the “law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2)
- Read the O.T. like the mail of a Jewish friend...

### C.S. Lewis... from Mere Christianity

C.S. Lewis, a well-known apologist and Christian thinker, wrote well before our time, but he wrote highly applicable and practical truths about Christian living that still ring true

today. While Lewis provides a wealth of wisdom, here are five tips relevant in today's age taken from his book "*Mere Christianity*."

## 1. Possess true humility

"True humility isn't thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less." –  
C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

## 2. Choose Truth over originality

## 3. Pursue God over "happiness"

## 4. Understand that "progress" often means turning around

"Progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be... If you are on the wrong road, progress means turning around and walking back to the right road..." –C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

(Turning around is essentially the definition of repentance, which means to turn away from sin and turn to God.)

## 5. Listen to the Holy Spirit

## What commandments did Jesus give us?

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by [Matt Slick](#)

Jesus gave many commands in [Scripture](#). Some of them were for Christians as a whole, and some were intended for the disciples only, i.e., [Matthew 10:5-15](#) and [Matthew 26:36](#). Some verses were directed at the apostles specifically but can also apply to us today such as . . .

- "And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? 41 "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ([Matthew 26:40-41](#)).
- "And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." ([Mark 8:34](#)).

Not every command of [Christ](#) is listed here because, as I said above, some commands apply only to the people at the time he walked the earth. Nevertheless, following are those that apply to us.

1. Repent
  1. "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" ([Matthew 4:17](#)).
2. Follow Him
  1. "And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." ([Matthew 4:19](#)).
3. Let your light shine
  1. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." ([Matthew 5:16](#)).
4. Be reconciled
  1. "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." ([Matthew 5:23-24](#)).
5. Don't Lust
  1. "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY', 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell." ([Matthew 5:27-30](#)).
6. Make no oaths
  1. "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God . . . 37 But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil." ([Matthew 5:34, 37](#)).
7. Don't resist evil with evil
  1. "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. 41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you." ([Matthew 5:39-42](#))
8. Love and pray for your enemies
  1. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" ([Matthew 5:44-46](#))
9. Be perfect (in love)

1. "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." ([Matthew 5:48](#)).
10. Seek God's Kingdom first
  1. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." ([Matthew 6:33](#)).
11. Don't Judge (un-righteously)
  1. "Do not judge (un-righteously) so that you will not be judged." ([Matthew 7:1](#)).
12. Don't give what is holy to dogs
  1. "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." ([Matthew 7:6](#)).
13. Treat people as you want to be treated
  1. "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." ([Matthew 7:12](#)).
14. Enter (heaven) through the narrow gate
  1. "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." ([Matthew 7:13-14](#)).
15. Beware of false prophets
  1. "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." ([Matthew 7:15-16](#)).
16. Follow Jesus
  1. "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead." ([Matt. 8:22](#)).
17. Ask God to send out workers
  1. " Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." ([Matthew 9:37-38](#)).
18. Don't fear those who can kill the body
  1. "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."([Matthew 10:28](#)).
19. Come to Jesus for rest
  1. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." ([Matthew 11:28](#)).
20. Confront brothers in private first
  1. "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." ([Matthew 18:15-17](#)).
21. Forgive Seven times Seventy
  1. "Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" ([Matthew 18:21-22](#)).
22. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's
  1. "They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." ([Matthew 22:21](#)).

23. Love God

1. "And He said to him, " ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'" ([Matthew 22:37–38](#)).

24. Love your Neighbor

1. "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" ([Matthew 22:39](#)).

25. Partake of Communion

1. While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body. 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you." ([Matthew 26:26–27](#)).

26. Keep guard against sin

1. "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ([Matthew 26:41](#)).

27. Make Disciples

1. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." ([Matthew 28:19-20](#)).

28. Preach the Gospel

1. "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." ([Mark 16:15](#)).

29. Be on guard against greed

1. "Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." ([Luke 12:15](#)).

30. Invite the poor

1. "And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. 13 "But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." ([Luke 14:12–14](#)).

31. Love one another

1. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." ([John 13:34](#)).
2. "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." ([John 15:12](#)).
3. "This I command you, that you love one another." ([John 15:17](#)).

JANUARY 10, 2014

Billy Graham

## 10 Guidelines for Christian Living

Over the last seven decades, Billy Graham has written 32 books which are an extension of his continued ministry and burden to reach as many people as possible with the Good News of the Gospel. In "Peace with God," Mr. Graham outlines ten guidelines for Christian living. This classic volume by Billy Graham points to the fact that God is the only way to find authentic personal peace in a world in crisis.

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Whether we are playing a game, driving a car, or baking a cake, there are certain rules that must be followed for our safety as well as our success.

The Bible teaches that the Christian life is one of constant growth. When you were born again, you were born into God's family. It is God's purpose that you will grow into full stature and become mature in Christ. It would be against the law of God and nature if you were to remain a baby and thus become a spiritual dwarf. In **2 Peter 3:18**, **the Bible says that we are to grow**. It implies steady development, constant enlargement, increasing wisdom.

**For one to grow properly certain rules must be observed for good spiritual health.**

1. **Read your Bible daily**. Do not be content to skim through a chapter merely to satisfy your conscience. Hide the Word of God in your heart. It comforts, guides, corrects, encourages – all we need is there.

2. **Learn the secret of prayer.** Prayer is communicating. Every prayer that you pray will be answered. Sometimes that answer may be “Yes” and sometimes “No,” and sometimes it is “Wait,” but nevertheless it will be answered.
3. **Rely constantly on the Holy Spirit.** We know that the Holy Spirit prays for us (Romans 8), and what a comfort that should be to the weakest of us. Stand aside and let Him take over all the choices and decisions of your life.
4. **Attend church regularly.** The visible church is Christ’s organization upon earth. Christians need one another, we need to gather together to worship God and nothing can take the place of church attendance.
5. **Be a witnessing Christian.** We witness in two ways: by life and by word – and the two, where possible, should go hand in hand.
6. **Let love be the ruling principle of your life.** Jesus said to those who followed Him, *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (John 13:35). The greatest demonstration of the fact that we are Christians is that we love one another.
7. **Be an obedient Christian.** Let Christ have first place in all the choices of your life.
8. **Learn how to meet temptation.** Temptation is not sin. It is *yielding* that is sin. Let Christ through the Holy Spirit do the fighting for you.
9. **Be a wholesome Christian.** Our lives and appearance should commend the Gospel and make it attractive to others.
10. **Live above your circumstances.** Don’t let your circumstances get you down. Learn to live graciously within them, realizing the Lord Himself is with you.

*Guidelines for Christian Living is excerpted from “Peace with God” by Billy Graham, published in 1953, revised and expanded in 1984.*

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# The Key to Christian Living

**Article by**

**Douglas Moo**

Professor, Wheaton College

Any Christian genuinely seeking to please God struggles with sin. We all recognize that we are not where God wants us; that our thoughts and actions are still far too worldly; that we are far short of the holiness that God insists should characterize His people.

No wonder, then, that a virtual “cottage industry” offering “the key to the Christian life” has sprung up in Christian circles. One cannot peruse a Christian publisher’s catalog or scan a list of local church seminar offerings without finding some writer or speaker claiming to have the solution to our struggle with sin. Some, perhaps most, of these books and seminars can genuinely help us grow in Christ. But almost all of them promise more than they can deliver — for there is no simple “key” to the successful Christian life, and success will not come easily but only after years of hard, dedicated spiritual discipline.

Paul gives us a glimpse of what the struggle against sin is like in [Romans 6:1-14](#). For five chapters he has proclaimed the Good News that sinners can be put right with God by believing on Christ and His work. But the more Paul emphasizes that we are justified by faith alone, the more we wonder whether there is any point in even trying to live a consistent Christian life. If God has already accepted us, why should we worry about sin? Paul’s basic answer is that the true Christian will

never seriously ask this question. To be justified by faith means that we also are brought into a relationship with Christ — and that relationship cannot help but change the very way we look at sin.

But we are particularly interested in the way Paul elaborates his answer. We can best understand Paul's response by unpacking its essential logic, a logic that proceeds in three steps:

We have died with Christ ([Romans 6:3](#)).

Christ died to sin ([Romans 6:10](#)).

Therefore, we have died to sin ([Romans 6:2](#)).

Following Romans 5, with its teaching about the sinner's identification with Adam in sin and death, and the believer's identification with Christ in righteousness and life, it is no wonder that Paul continues in Romans 6 to emphasize our real involvement with Christ in redemptive events. As Christ died to take away the penalty our sins had earned, so He also died to cancel the power of sin over us. Through faith, expressed in baptism, we identify with Christ and enjoy the power over sin that He Himself won (v. 10). Of course, Christ was never under sin's power in such a way that He was forced to sin. But as a fully incarnate man, He was exposed to its power. Therefore, His death won release from sin's power over Him. And it also wins release from sin's power for every Christian united with Him by faith.

And so Paul can claim that we have "died to sin." What does this mean?

A dear friend from seminary days, now with the Lord, once told me how he used to illustrate Romans 6 when he preached. He would remind the congregation just how much he loved strawberry shortcake. But, he would continue, when he was

dead, lying in his coffin, people could bring all the strawberry shortcake they wanted into the room and he would not react. He would be “dead” to strawberry shortcake.

My friend was not long into his ministry before he realized how bad an illustration this really was. The analogy suggests that the Christian who is “dead” to sin cannot react to it any longer — that sin cannot entice or tempt him. But we know from experience that this is just not true. More important, we know from Scripture that it is not true. For Paul goes on in this very passage to urge Christians not to let sin reign in their mortal bodies (v. 12). Such a command is simple nonsense if believers cannot react to sin any more. So being “dead to sin” does not mean we are insensitive to sin; it means we no longer are under its ruling power. Paul unpacks the concept of being “dead to sin” by claiming that we are “no longer . . . slaves of sin” (v. 6); thus, he can conclude, “sin shall not have dominion over you” (v. 14).

What Paul presents as the “key” to the Christian life, therefore, is a new relationship to sin, anchored in our identification with Christ’s own death and resurrection. In that new relationship, sin no longer has the power to dictate terms to us. But this new relationship does not mean that the battle with sin is over. Indeed, in a sense, it means that it has just begun. The non-Christian, while capable of doing good things by virtue of God’s common grace, can never win out over sin. But we can. God has given the Christian a new power over sin. It is our job to use it in fighting the continuing, manifold enticements of sin.

This is why Paul concludes this passage with a call to arms: “Do not present your members as instruments [or weapons] of unrighteousness to sin, but present

yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments [or weapons] of righteousness to God” (v. 13). Paul gives no hint that this battle will end any time soon; indeed, he makes clear elsewhere that it will not be until God redeems our bodies in the last day that we will have final victory over sin (Rom. 8:23).

For Paul, then, the “key” to the Christian life is a new relationship to sin through identification with Jesus Christ. This is not a key that we can put in the lock and magically open the door to total holiness. It is more like a power source from which we draw every day as we seek to conform our lives more and more closely to the One who died for us.

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*Website: [www.ligonier.org/tabletalk](http://www.ligonier.org/tabletalk). Email: [tabletalk@ligonier.org](mailto:tabletalk@ligonier.org). Toll free: 1-800-435-4343.*

*Douglas Moo is the Kenneth T. Wessner professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and [the author of several New Testament commentaries](#).*

**[RADICAL: Teachings on Obedience:](#)**

**Everyone loves Jesus – until they read what he really taught.**

**A popular adage has regularly been applied to the person of Jesus—he comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. This was true for his original audience and continues to be so for his contemporary readers.**

Jesus's life and teachings are just as radical today as they were 2000 years ago. It's easy to call ourselves Christians. But are we really willing to accept and follow *everything* Jesus taught?

All of Christ's teachings are important, but here are some of the most challenging:

***1) Love your enemies – Matthews 5.43-47***

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

***2) Turn the other cheek – Matthew 5.38-42***

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and

take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

### ***3) God or money: you have to choose – Matthew 6.24***

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

### ***4) Don't worry about anything, seek God instead – Matthew 6.25-26, 31-33***

[D]o not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [...] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

### ***5) Many are on the path to destruction, and only a few even find the way to life – Matthew 7.13-14***

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

## *6) You must deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Jesus – Luke 9.23-25*

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

## *7) Jesus > Everyone else – Luke 14.26*

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

## *8) There is a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” – Matthew 13-41-43*

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

## *9) Rejoice when you are persecuted on account of Jesus – Matthew 5.10-11*

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## *10) Luke's version of the Beatitudes – Luke 6. 20-23*

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!

Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

## *11) ...and their corresponding Woes – Luke 6.24-26*

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

## *12) The world hated Jesus, so expect the world to hate Christians – John 15.18-20*

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

## 13) *Serve the poor, or go to hell – Matthew 25.41-46*

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

## 14) *Jesus is the only way to God – John 14.6*

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

SALTLESS SALT Passage: Mark 9:49-50

FORGIVENESS Passage : Matthew 18:21-35 So also My Heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

ENVY BECAUSE OF GOD’S GENEROSITY Passage: Matthew 20:1-15

FAITH THAT MOVES MOUNTAINS Passage - Matthew 17:20

### **‘I came to bring a sword’**

In John 14:27 Jesus says, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.* But then in Matthew 10:14 we read: *Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword.*

“Let me amplify and paraphrase, then, what it seems Jesus was saying [Luke 12]: 'In light of the fact that you have a God in heaven who is set on caring for you as a shepherd does his

sheep, as a father does his children, and as a king does who is passing on an entire kingdom, don't be anxious. Sell your possessions, give to the poor, and don't worry. Your God - your Shepherd, your Father your King - has everything under control.”

“I could not help but think that somewhere along the way we had missed what is radical about our faith and replaced it with what is comfortable.

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

## Fear Him Who Has Power to Cast into Hell (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4-5)

This saying doubly offends because it seemingly advocates fear, which modern Christians reject as the basis for a relationship with God (see 1 John 4:18), and because it threatens the judgment of hell, which some consider to contradict the loving character of God. First it must be said that the word for *fear* has multiple senses. In the Greek language it likely refers to a strong respect or reverence, which is why in Acts 9:31 the church can “go on in the fear of the Lord.”

### “**RADICAL**” quotes from David Platt:

“We are settling for a Christianity that revolves around catering to ourselves when the central message of Christianity is actually about abandoning ourselves.”

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

*“The modern-day gospel says, 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Therefore, follow these steps, and you can be saved.' Meanwhile, the biblical gospel says, 'You are an enemy of God, dead in your sin, & in your present state of rebellion, you are not even able to see that you need life, much less to cause yourself to come to*

*life. Therefore, you are radically dependent on God to do something in your life that you could never do.”*

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

*“If we were left to ourselves with the task of taking the gospel to the world, we would immediately begin planning innovative strategies and plotting elaborate schemes. We would organize conventions, develop programs, and create foundations... But Jesus is so different from us. With the task of taking the gospel to the world, he wandered through the streets and byways...All He wanted was a few men who would think as He did, love as He did, see as He did, teach as He did and serve as He did. All He needed was to revolutionize the hearts of a few, and they would impact the world.”*

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

*“Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell.”*

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

*(In the contemporary church), faith is a matter of taste, not of truth...* I implore you to consider the urgent need before us to forsake the American dream, in favor of radical abandonment to the person and purpose of Christ.”

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

“I can almost picture the disciples faces. "No, not the drink-my-blood speech! **We'll never get on the list of fastest-growing movements if you keep asking them to eat you!**”

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

*“Disciple making is not a call for others to come to us to hear the gospel but a command for us to go to others to share the gospel.”*

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

“This is the unavoidable conclusion of Matthew 10. To *everyone wanting a safe, untroubled, comfortable life free from danger, stay away from Jesus. The danger in our lives will always increase in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ.*”

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

*“[...]not even dying a martyr's death is classified as extraordinary obedience when you are following a Savior who died on a cross.”*

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

*“We can so easily deceive ourselves, mistaking the presence of physical bodies in a crowd for the existence of spiritual life in a community.”*

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

*“As if this were not enough, Jesus finished his seeker-sensitive plea with a pull-at-your-heartstrings conclusion. “Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”<sup>8</sup> Give up everything you have, carry a cross, and hate your family. This sounds a lot different than “Admit, believe, confess, and pray a prayer after me.”*

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

*“Our possessions can be deadly. They can be subtly deadly.”*

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

(“Jim Elliot once said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”)

*“We live in a church culture that has a dangerous tendency to disconnect the grace of God from the glory of God. Our hearts resonate with the idea of enjoying God’s grace. We bask in sermons, conferences, and books that exalt a grace centering on us. And while the wonder of grace is worthy of our attention, if that grace is disconnected from its purpose, the sad result is a self-centered Christianity that bypasses the heart of God.”*

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

**...we have drawn an unbiblical line of distinction, assigning the obligations of Christianity to a few while keeping the privileges of Christianity for us all.**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

“if we stop and really look at God in his Word, we might discover that he evokes greater awe and demands deeper worship than we are ready to give him.”

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“The war against materialism in our hearts is exactly that: a war. It is a constant battle to resist the temptation to have more luxuries, to acquire more stuff, and to live more comfortably. It requires strong and steady resolve to live out the gospel...”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

“One of the unintended consequences of contemporary church strategies that revolve around performances, places, programs, and professionals is that somewhere along the way people get left out of the picture.”

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“While some professing Christians have rejected universalism intellectually, practically they may end up leading universalistic lives. They claim Christ is necessary for salvation, yet they live their Christianity in silence, as if people around them in the world will indeed be okay in the end without Christ.”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“The will of God is for you and me to give our lives urgently and recklessly to making the gospel and the glory of God known among all peoples, particularly those who have never even heard of Jesus. The question, therefore, is not “Can we find God’s will?” The question is “Will we obey God’s will?” Will we refuse to sit back and wait for some tingly feeling to go down our spines before we rise up and do what we have already been commanded to do?”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“Sacrifice is giving away what it hurts to give. Sacrifice is not giving according to your ability; it’s giving beyond your ability.”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“God's design for taking the gospel to the world is a slow, intentional, simple process that involves every one of his people sacrificing every facet of their lives to multiply the life of Christ in others.”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“Jesus was not, and never is, interested in being seen as a respectable teacher. He is the sovereign Lord. He doesn't give options for people to consider; he gives commands for people to obey.”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“I am convinced that we as Christ followers in American churches have embraced values and ideas that are not only unbiblical but that actually contradict the gospel we claim to believe.”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

“God's revelation in the Gospel not only reveals Who He is, but it also reveals who we are.”

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

“We may have loved the god that we made up in our minds, but the God of the Bible, we hate.”

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

**“One preacher described it as if you and I were standing a short hundred yards away from a dam of water ten thousand miles high and ten thousand miles wide. All of a sudden that dam was breached, and a torrential flood of water came crashing toward us. Right before it reached our feet, the ground in front of us opened up and swallowed it all. At the Cross, Christ drank the full cup of the wrath of God, and when he had downed the last drop, he turned the cup over and cried out, “It is finished.” This is the gospel.”**

– David Platt, Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream

## CLOSE:

***“You and I can choose to continue with business as usual in the Christian life and in the church as a whole, enjoying success based on the standards defined by the culture around us. Or we can take an honest look at the Jesus of the Bible and dare to ask what the consequences might be if we really believed him and really obeyed him.”***

– David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

## Chapter 11

These laws seem to have been intended, 1. As a test of the people's obedience, as Adam was forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge; and to teach them self-denial, and the government of their appetites. 2. To keep the Israelites distinct from other nations. Many also of these forbidden animals were objects of superstition and idolatry to the heathen. 3. The people were taught to make distinctions between the holy and unholy in their companions and intimate connexions. 4. The law forbid, not only the eating of the unclean beasts, but the touching of them. Those who would be kept from any sin, must be careful to avoid all temptations to it, or coming near it. The exceptions are very minute, and all were designed to call forth constant care and exactness in their obedience; and to teach us to obey. Whilst we enjoy our Christian liberty, and are free from such burdensome observances, we must be careful not to abuse our liberty. For the Lord hath redeemed and called his people, that they may be holy, even as he is holy. We must come out, and be separate from the world; we must leave the company of the ungodly, and all needless connexions with those who are dead in sin; we must be zealous of good works devoted followers of God, and companions of his people.

## Chapter 12

After the laws concerning clean and unclean food, come the laws concerning clean and unclean persons. **Man imparts his depraved nature to his offspring**, so that, excepting as the atonement of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit prevent, the original blessing, "Increase and multiply," [Gen 1:28](#), is become to the fallen race a direful curse, and communicates sin and misery. Let those women who have received mercy from God in child-bearing, with all thankfulness own God's goodness to them; and this shall please the Lord better than sacrifices.

## Chapter 13

### *Directions to the Priest to Judge Concerning Leprosy (13:1-17)*

**The plague of leprosy was an uncleanness, rather than a disease.** Christ is said to cleanse lepers, not to cure them. Common as the leprosy was among the Hebrews, during and after their residence in Egypt, we have no reason to believe that it was known among them before. Their distressed state and employment in that land must have rendered them liable to disease. But **it was a plague often inflicted immediately by the hand of God. Miriam's leprosy, and Gehazi's, and king Uzziah's, were punishments of particular sins**; no marvel there was care taken to distinguish it from a common distemper. The judgment of it was referred to the priests. And it was a figure of the moral pollutions of men's minds by sin, which is the leprosy of the soul, defiling to the conscience, and from which Christ alone can cleanse. **The priest could only convict the leper, (by the law is the knowledge of sin,) but Christ can cure the sinner, he can take away sin.** It is a work of great importance, but of great difficulty, to judge of our spiritual state. We all have cause to suspect ourselves, being conscious of sores and spots; but whether clean or unclean is the question. As there were certain marks by which to know it was leprosy, so there are marks of such as are in the gall of bitterness. The priest must take time in making his judgment. This teaches all, both ministers and people, not to be hasty in censures, nor to judge anything before the time. If some men's sins go before unto judgment, the sins of others follow after, and so do men's good works. If the person suspected were found to be clean, yet he must wash his clothes, because there had been ground for the suspicion. We have need to be washed in the blood of Christ from our spots, though not leprosy spots; for who can say, I am pure from sin?

### *Further Directions (13:18-44)*

**The priest is told what judgment to make, if there were any appearance of a leprosy in old sores; and such is the danger of those who having escaped the pollutions of the world are again entangled therein.** Or, in a burn by accident, [Lev 13:24](#). The burning of strife and contention often occasions the rising and breaking out of that corruption, which proves that men are unclean. Human life lies exposed to many grievances. With what troops of diseases are we beset on every side; and thy all entered by sin! If the constitution be healthy, and the body lively and easy, we are bound to glorify God with our bodies. Particular note was taken of the leprosy, if in the head. If the leprosy of sin has seized the head; if the judgment be corrupted, and wicked principles, which support wicked practices, are embraced, it is utter uncleanness, from which few are cleansed. Soundness in the faith keeps leprosy from the head.

### *How the Leper Must Be Disposed Of ([13:45,46](#))*

When the priest had pronounced the leper unclean, it put a stop to his business in the world, cut him off from his friends and relations, and ruined all the comfort he could have in the world. He must humble himself under the mighty hand of God, not insisting upon his cleanness, when the priest had pronounced him unclean, but accepting the punishment. Thus must we take to ourselves the shame that belongs to us, and with broken hearts call ourselves "Unclean, unclean;" heart unclean, life unclean; unclean by original corruption, unclean by actual transgression; unclean, therefore deserving to be for ever shut out from communion with God, and all hope of happiness in him; unclean, therefore undone, if infinite mercy do not interpose. The leper must warn others to take heed of coming near him. He must then be shut out of the camp, and afterward, when they came to Canaan, be shut out of the city, town, or village where he lived, and dwell with none but those that were lepers like himself. This typified the purity which ought to be in the gospel church.

### *The Leprosy in Garments ([13:47-59](#))*

The garment suspected to be tainted with leprosy was not to be burned immediately. If, upon search, it was found that there was a leprosy spot, it must be burned, or at least that part of it. If it proved to be free, it must be washed, and then might be used. This also sets forth the great evil there is in sin. It not only defiles the sinner's conscience, but it brings a stain upon all he has and all that he does. And those who make their clothes servants to their pride and lust, may see them thereby tainted with leprosy. But the robes of righteousness never fret, nor are moth-eaten.

## **Chapter 14**

### *Of Declaring the Leper to Be Clean ([14:1-9](#))*

The priests could not cleanse the lepers; but when the Lord removed the plague, various rules were to be observed in admitting them again to the ordinances of God, and the society of his people. They represent many duties and exercises of truly repenting sinners, and the duties of ministers respecting them. If we apply this to the spiritual leprosy of sin, it intimates that when we withdraw from those who walk disorderly, we must not count them as enemies, but admonish them as brethren. And also that when God by his grace has brought to repentance, they ought with tenderness and joy, and sincere affection, to be received again. Care should always be taken that sinners may not be encouraged, nor penitents discouraged. If it were found that the leprosy was healed, the priest must declare it with the particular solemnities here described. The two birds, one killed, and the other dipped in the blood of the bird that was killed, and then let loose, may signify Christ shedding his blood for sinners, and rising and ascending into heaven. The priest having pronounced the leper clean from the disease, he must make himself clean from all remains of it. Thus those who have comfort of the remission of their sins, must with care and caution cleanse themselves from sins; for every one that has this hope in him, will be concerned to purify himself.

### *The Sacrifices to Be Offered by Him ([14:10-32](#))*

The cleansed leper was to be presented to the Lord, with his offerings. When God has restored us to enjoy public worship again, after sickness, distance, or otherwise, we should testify our thanksgiving by our diligent use of the liberty. And both we and our offerings must be presented before the Lord, by the Priest that made us clean, even our Lord Jesus. Beside the usual rites of the trespass-offering, some of the blood, and some of the oil, was to be put upon him that was to be cleansed. Wherever the blood of Christ is applied for justification, the oil of the Spirit is applied for sanctification; these two cannot be separated. We have here the gracious provision the law made for poor lepers. The poor are as welcome to God's altar as the rich. But though a meaner sacrifice was accepted from the poor, yet the same ceremony was used for the rich; their souls are as precious, and Christ and his gospel are the same to both. Even for the poor one lamb was necessary. No sinner could be saved, had it not been for the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God with his blood.

### *The Leprosy in a House ([14:33-53](#))*

The leprosy in a house is unaccountable to us, as well as the leprosy in a garment; but now sin, where that reigns in a house, is a plague there, as it is in a heart. Masters of families should be aware, and afraid of the first appearance of sin in their families, and put it away, whatever it is. If the leprosy is got into the house, the infected part must be taken out. If it remain in the house, the whole must be pulled down. The owner had better be without a dwelling, than live in one that was infected. The leprosy of sin ruins families and churches. Thus sin is so interwoven with the human body, that it must be taken down by death.

### *Summary of the Law Concerning Leprosy ([14:54-57](#))*

When that God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us by his grace, [Eph 2:4, 5](#), we shall manifest the change by repenting, and forsaking former sins. Let us follow after holiness, and let us compassionate other poor lepers, and desire, seek, and pray for their cleansing.

## **Chapter 15**

We need not be curious in explaining these laws; but have reason to be thankful that we need fear no defilement, except that of sin, nor need ceremonial and burdensome purifications. These laws remind us that God sees all things, even those which escape the notice of men. The great gospel duties of faith and repentance are here signified, and the great gospel privileges of the application of Christ's blood to our souls for our justification, and his grace for our sanctification.

# Cleanliness And Godliness

## [Leviticus 11-12](#)

Cleanliness is next to godliness." John Wesley is generally credited with that saying; but it's likely the proverb was current before his time. In fact, the way Wesley quoted it in his sermon "On Dress" indicates that his listeners were already familiar with the maxim.

The Jews would readily identify with the saying; in the camp of Israel, the concepts of *cleanliness* and *godliness* were so intertwined that they were almost synonymous. The Jews feared lest they become ceremonially unclean because of something they had touched or eaten. From birth to burial, the Jews had to submit every aspect of their daily lives to the authority of God's law. Whether it was selecting their food, preparing their food, caring for a mother and new baby, diagnosing a disease, or disposing of waste, nothing was left to chance in the camp of Israel lest someone be defiled. In order to maintain ceremonial purity, each Jew had to obey God's law in several areas of life.

Eating (Lev. 11:1-23)

Since Noah knew about clean and unclean animals ([Gen. 7:1-10](#)), this distinction was part of an ancient tradition that antedated the Mosaic Law. Whether a creature was "clean" or "unclean" had nothing to do with the quality of the beast; it all depended on what God said about the animal. When He gave these laws, no doubt the Lord had the health of His people in mind ([Ex. 15:26](#); [Deut. 7:15](#)), but the main purpose of the dietary code was to remind the Israelites that they belonged to God and were obligated to keep themselves separated from everything that would defile them. "Be holy, for I am holy" ([Lev. 11:44](#); see [Deut. 14:3-20](#) for a parallel list of clean and unclean foods).

Nevertheless, the spiritual principle of separation from defilement applies to the people of God today. The fact that we know God must make a difference in every aspect of our lives. "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" ([1 Cor. 6:20](#), NKJV). "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" ([10:31](#), NKJV). God hasn't given His church a list of things that are clean and unclean, but He's revealed enough to us in His Word to help us know what pleases Him and what grieves Him.

Three facts should be noted about the dietary laws: (1) God gave these laws only to the Jewish nation; (2) obeying them guaranteed ceremonial purity but didn't automatically make the person holy in character; and (3) the laws were temporary and were ended on the cross of Christ ([Col. 2:14](#)).

Jesus' made it clear to His disciples that all foods were clean ([Mark 7:1ff](#)), and God taught this lesson again to Peter before He sent him to minister to the "unclean" Gentiles ([Acts 10:9-16](#)). Paul affirmed that special days and diets must not be considered either the *means* or the *measure* of a person's spirituality ([Rom. 14:1-15:13](#)). "But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" ([1 Cor. 8:8](#), NIV). It's wrong to judge other Christians on the basis of what they eat ([Col. 2:16-23](#)). As long as they believe God's Word that all foods are clean, and ask God to bless their food, they have the right to eat it ([1 Tim. 4:1-6](#)).

It isn't necessary to identify every creature named in this chapter. In fact, some of them are mysteries to us. Keep in mind that the law named *representative* creatures and didn't attempt to give a complete list. Moses gave the general characteristics of the creatures that were approved and disapproved, and the people had to exercise discernment in applying the law. If a creature was doubtful, it was rejected; there was no sense taking a chance of becoming defiled.

**Land animals** ([vv. 1-8](#)). The two requirements were that the animal chew the cud and have a split hoof. An animal with only one of these features wasn't considered clean and had to be rejected. The Hebrew word translated "hare" in [verse 6](#) ("rabbit," NIV) refers to an animal we're not familiar with, because the kinds of rabbits we're familiar with don't chew the cud. The movements of a rabbit's jaw and nostrils may give the appearance that he's chewing the cud, but that isn't the case at all.

**Water creatures** ([vv. 9-12](#)). These had to have both fins and scales to be edible; and so all shellfish, catfish, and eels were prohibited. Aquatic creatures that are scavengers and burrow in the bottom of a body of water could pick up parasites that would be dangerous to the eater's health. Since fish swim freely in the water, they generally escape such infections.

**Fowl** ([vv. 13-19](#)). Carrion-eating birds of prey would be defiled by the dead carcasses of their victims as well as by the blood still in the flesh; this made them doubly unclean. When Israel lusted after meat, the Lord sent them quails ([Ex. 16:1-13](#); [Num. 11:31-35](#)).

**Flying insects** ([vv. 20-23](#)). All insects were forbidden except those with jointed hind legs used for jumping, such as locusts, katydids, crickets, and grasshoppers. These creatures aren't normally a part of the Western diet, but many peoples in the East eat parts of their bodies roasted. John the Baptist lived on a diet of locusts and wild honey ([Matt. 3:4](#)). The Jews would shun cockroaches, flies, and other insects of that variety.

Some years ago, during the course of my annual physical examination, my doctor discovered that my sugar count was rather high. He checked it very carefully and then informed me that I was a borderline diabetic in danger of experiencing some serious calamity, like a heart attack or blindness. The easiest solution to my problem was to lose weight, so I immediately went on a diet.

He gave me a piece of good advice. "Remember the secret of a happy diet is to learn to hate the things that aren't good for you and to enjoy the things that are good for you."

It worked! I followed the diet, lost my taste for sweets and rich desserts, and soon got rid of the excess weight that was threatening my health, if not my life. We got the sugar under control.

The Jews under the Old Covenant had to adopt a similar outlook on life. They had to learn to despise the foods that God said were unclean and to enjoy the foods that God said were clean. It was a choice between pleasing themselves and being unclean or pleasing the Lord and being clean. There was no middle ground. If any food was questionable, it should have been automatically rejected, lest they disobey God and defile themselves.

When I was a young believer, somebody gave me a copy of the tract "Others May, You Cannot"; it was a big help to me. I learned that I had to get my directions from God and not from other people, and that I had to be willing to be different. My great desire had to be to please the Lord joyfully, not grudgingly, and not to see how close I could get to sin and still not get into trouble.

Touching (Lev. 11:24-43)

The emphasis in this section is on avoiding the defilement caused by touching certain dead creatures, both clean and unclean. If a Jew happened upon the carcass of even a clean animal, he knew it was denied because the blood hadn't been properly drained out nor had the meat been protected from contamination. When Samson ate the honey from the carcass of the lion, he defiled himself and ceased to be a Nazarite ([Judges 14:1-9](#); see [Num. 6:6, 9](#)). No matter how sweet the honey was, it was unclean in God's sight; this made Samson unclean.

People who became defiled from touching a carcass were considered unclean until the end of the day. They had to wash themselves and their clothes and couldn't enter the camp until sunset. This kept them from spreading to others any contamination they might have picked up from touching the dead animal. If a dead creature fell into an earthen vessel, the vessel was smashed. Anything touched by the carcass was unclean and had to be either washed or destroyed.

It's easy to see hygienic reasons behind these regulations, and no doubt obeying them helped the Jews avoid sickness. But the main reason for these laws was to teach the people to appreciate cleanliness and shun whatever was unclean. Paul's admonition of the Corinthians is a contemporary application of this principle and must be pondered and obeyed by any believer who is serious about holy living ([2 Cor. 6:14-7:1](#)).

Moses also added lizards, rodents, and other creeping things to the list of prohibited foods ([Lev. 11:29-30](#)). These small creatures could die and be so concealed that a person would not know the carcass was there before they had touched it and become defiled. Or the corpse might fall into a container or on fabric, and this would make the item unclean. Jewish women were very careful in their housekeeping lest anything be present that would make the inhabitants unclean.

Thirty-two times in [Leviticus 11](#), you find the word *unclean*, and ten times you find the word *abomination*. What God says is unclean must be an abomination in our eyes. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" ([Isa. 5:20](#), NIV). The first step toward disobedience is often "reclassifying" sin and making it look acceptable instead of abominable.

For example, God said that the tree in the midst of the garden was off-limits to the man and woman, but Eve "saw that the tree was good for food" ([Gen. 3:6](#)) and took the fruit. God said that all the spoil of Jericho was under divine restriction and not to be touched by the Jewish soldiers ([Josh. 6:16-19](#)), but Achan revised that classification and took some of the spoil ([7:16-26](#)). It cost him his life. Samuel told King Saul to slay all the Amalekites and their flocks and herds, but the king kept Agag alive and kept "the best of the sheep and of the oxen" to give to the Lord ([1 Sam. 15:15](#)). Saul reclassified what God had said was abominable and thought this would make it acceptable, but his folly caused him to lose his kingdom.

Today, we live in a society that rejects moral absolutes and promotes a "fluid" morality that isn't morality at all. Like the people described in the Book of Judges, everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes ([Judges 21:25](#)). But society's reclassifying of sin hasn't changed anything; God still calls sin an abomination and still judges it.

Doctors can be sued for malpractice if they make the wrong diagnosis and prescribe the wrong treatment. But a university professor, a liberal preacher, or a popular newspaper columnist can excuse sin and defend immorality and be applauded for the skillful diagnosis. Why? Because the human heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" ([Jer. 17:9](#)) and people love "darkness rather than light" because their deeds are evil ([John 3:19](#)).

Evangelist Billy Sunday used to say that a sinner can't find God for the same reason a criminal can't find a police officer: the criminal isn't looking very hard! "Prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit," wrote Jeremiah the prophet. "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace" ([Jer. 8:11](#), NIV). The people are persecuted who have the right diagnosis and the only remedy, while the people with the false diagnosis and the useless remedy are honored. "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" ([5:31](#)).

Discerning ([Lev. 11:44-47](#))

If the Jewish people were to keep themselves clean and pleasing to the Lord, they had to exercise discernment; this meant knowing God's Word, respecting it, and obeying it. Fathers and mothers had to teach their children the law and warn them about the things that were unclean ([Deut. 6:1-9](#)). The priests had to teach the people and remind them of the commandments of the Lord. It was when the nation of Israel neglected the Word of God and refused to obey it that the people began to follow the abominable practices of the heathen nations around them, and this is what led to Israel's discipline and defeat.

The Jews had to remind themselves every hour of every day that they belonged to Jehovah, the true and living God, and that belonging to the nation of Israel was a high and holy privilege. "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy" ([Lev. 11:44](#), NIV). In New Testament language, "Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" ([Eph. 4:1](#), NKJV). Obeying God's will isn't a burden; it's a privilege! As Moses reminded his people, "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" ([Deut. 4:7-8](#), NKJV)

The Old Testament Jew, like the New Testament Christian, was not to walk "as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind" ([Eph. 4:17](#)). It was a temptation to "go along with" and then imitate the pagan practices of the heathen nations, and this led to Israel's defilement and discipline. I fear that the church today is following the same philosophy and becoming more and more like the world. G. Campbell Morgan was right when he said that the church did the most for the world when the church was the least like the world.

Jews who exercised spiritual discernment would "walk in love" ([Eph. 5:2](#)), and their love for the Lord would motivate them to obey His law. Each morning, the orthodox Jew would recite "The Shema," the official Jewish confession of faith: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" ([Deut. 6:4-5](#), NIV). That is still the first great commandment ([Matt. 22:34-40](#)).

Like Israel in the Old Testament, believers today must not only walk worthy of their calling and walk in love, but also must "walk circumspectly... understanding what the will of the Lord is" ([Eph. 5:15, 17](#)). We must keep our eyes open and look around carefully lest we defile ourselves. Jews who knew what God said was clean and unclean, and who exercised constant caution, weren't likely to touch something unclean and defile themselves. When we "walk as children of light" ([Eph. 5:8](#)), we won't stumble over some carcass in the darkness; for God's Word is the light that directs us ([Ps. 119:105](#)).

The Lord reminded His people that it was He who had redeemed them from Egyptian bondage ([Lev. 11:45](#)). Therefore, they belonged to Him and were obligated to obey His will. Christ has redeemed us, not that we might be free to please ourselves, but that we might be free to serve Him, which is the greatest freedom of all. In giving His law, the Lord frequently used the miracle of the Exodus to call Israel to obedience ([19:36](#); [22:31-33](#); [25:38, 42, 55](#); [26:13, 45](#)). In New Testament language, the Jews had been "bought with a price" and were obligated to glorify the Lord who had redeemed them ([1 Cor. 6:20](#); [1 Peter 1:18-25](#)).

One of the marks of maturity is the ability "to make a difference" ([Lev. 11:47](#)) and distinguish between right and wrong. As a pathologist looks through his or her microscope, he or she can see a difference between a healthy cell and a cancerous cell. The expert musician can hear the difference between the right note and the almost-right note, and the expert writer knows the difference between "any word" and the right word. Likewise, mature believers can exercise discernment, identify that which is unclean, and avoid it. Remember, children are prone to walk into the mud and get dirty.

What the Prophet Hosea said about Israel in his day is true of many professed Christians today: "You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you.... My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" ([Hosea 4:5-6](#), NIV). "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" ([Heb. 5:14](#), NIV). Commenting on [1 Corinthians 2:13-16](#), Vance Havner said, "Nothing is more rare in churches today than discernment. The natural man knows nothing of it, the carnal man is devoid of it. Only the spiritual man has it and we have all too few in that category."

Purifying (Lev. 12:1-8)

God graciously made provision for the cleansing and restoration of anyone who became defiled. For routine situations of uncleanness, the normal procedure was for people to wash themselves and their clothing and remain outside the camp until evening. [Numbers 19](#) describes the preparation of special "water of purification" that was kept outside the camp and used for ceremonial cleansing. But with some kinds of defilement, additional measures were necessary, as in cases of childbirth ([Lev. 12](#)) and the presence of infectious sores or diseases (chaps. 13-15).

***Mother and child*** ([vv. 1-5](#)). In giving birth to a baby, the mother experienced bleeding ([vv. 4-5, 7](#)), as well as the secretion of other bodily fluids (see chap. 15); and this made her *ceremonially* unclean. The theme of this chapter is not personal holiness but *ritual* purification for the mother, without which she could not return to normal life in her home and in the camp.

Therefore, nothing in [Leviticus 12](#) should be interpreted to teach that human sexuality is "dirty," that pregnancy is defiling, or that babies are impure. God created humans "male and female" ([Gen. 1:27](#)), and when God declared His creation to be "very good" ([v. 31](#)), that declaration included sex. He commanded our first parents to "be fruitful, and multiply" ([v. 28](#)); in spite of contemporary negative attitudes toward babies, Scripture presents children as blessings from God ([Pss. 113:9; 127:3-5; 128:3; Prov. 17:6; Matt. 19:14](#)). If for some reason a pregnancy was unwanted, the Jews would never consider aborting the baby.

There are probably matters of health involved in these instructions. Since the mother was considered to some measure "unclean" for forty days after the birth of a son, or eighty days after the birth of a daughter, it meant that she had opportunity for rest and recuperation before returning to her household duties. This would encourage her own well-being as well as that of the baby. It would also protect her from possible sickness carried by infected people seeking to assist her, or the spread of any infection she might have (that is, childbed fever).

Scripture doesn't explain why twice as much time is assigned to a daughter than to a son. There's no proof that girl babies are necessarily weaker than boy babies and therefore need a longer time with the mother. A daughter would one day be subject to the judgment placed on Eve ([Gen. 3:16](#)), but why would God double the confinement of the mother because of the sex of her child, something over which she had no control? And it doesn't seem reasonable that God set up this schedule in order to "punish" the husband by doubling the time he'd have to be apart from his wife. Perhaps God established these regulations primarily for the health of the mother and her "bonding" to her daughter. The social structure of Israel was decidedly masculine, and sons were more welcome than daughters.

***Circumcision*** ([v. 3](#)). In ancient days, other nations practiced circumcision; but God gave this rite to Abraham as a special mark of the covenant He had with the people of Israel ([Gen. 17:10-14](#)). Each male child became a "child of the covenant" when he was circumcised and named eight days after his birth. The operation also symbolized the "spiritual surgery" that God wants to perform on the human heart ([Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4](#)). Unfortunately, the Jewish people ignored the spiritual aspect of the ceremony and considered the physical operation alone a

guarantee that the Jews were saved and accepted by God ([Matt. 3:7-10](#); [Rom. 2:25-29](#)). A similar idea emerged in the early church and had to be strongly refuted ([Acts 15](#); [Rom. 4:1-12](#)).

Some people equate infant baptism with circumcision; but as R.K. Harrison wisely states it, "The parallels are too superficial and narrow to be entirely convincing or valid." The true believer has experienced an inner spiritual circumcision through the Holy Spirit, the "true circumcision" that changes the heart and imparts new life ([Gal. 6:12-16](#); [Phil. 3:1-3](#); [Col. 2:10-11](#)). Because the sinful nature of the believer has been "put off," he or she can walk in newness of life and does not have to yield to the desires of the flesh.

*Sacrifice* ([yv. 4-8](#)). Forty days after the birth of a son, or eighty days after the birth of a daughter, the mother and father were required to go to the sanctuary and offer the sacrifices for the mother's cleansing; a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a dove or pigeon for a sin offering. The burnt offering symbolized her dedication to God as she returned to her normal life, and the sin offering took care of the defilement involved in the birth process. It also reminded them that every child, no matter how beautiful or delightful he or she might be, is born in sin and must one day trust the Lord for salvation ([Pss. 51:5](#); [58:3](#)).

How gracious of God to make allowances for the poor who couldn't afford a lamb! Mary and Joseph took advantage of this provision when they brought Jesus to the temple ([Luke 2:21-24](#)).

This entire chapter, brief as it is, shows God's loving concern for the family, especially mother and child. We aren't at all surprised to hear Jesus say, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" ([Mark 10:14](#), NIV).

Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Holy (Leviticus).

## The Great Physician

### [Leviticus 13-15](#)

The beginning of health is to know the disease," wrote the Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes, and every physician would agree with him. After all, how can you prescribe effectively if you don't diagnose accurately?

These three chapters in Leviticus deal with bodily infirmities of one kind or another, because God was concerned about His people's physical welfare. He cared for their needs during their wilderness march ([Deut. 29:5](#)) and, if they obeyed Him, He promised to shield them from the diseases they'd seen in Egypt ([Ex. 15:26](#); [Deut. 7:12-15](#)). While it's true that our greatest needs are spiritual, God still has the physical well-being of His people at heart.

The Hebrew word translated *leprosy* in [Leviticus 14-15](#) includes various skin diseases and even mildew ([13:47ff](#); [14:33ff](#)). But there's more to these chapters than simply a description of symptoms and ceremonies. In Scripture, disease is one of the images of sin ([Ps. 147:3](#); [Isa. 1:5-6](#); [Jer. 8:2](#); [30:12](#); [Mark 2:17](#)). Thus as we study these chapters, we can learn what sin is like and how God wants us to deal with it. We must look beyond Moses to Jesus Christ, the Great Physician, who was wounded that we might be healed ([Isa. 53:5](#)). These three chapters illustrate three topics that are vitally related to the life of holiness: sin ([Lev. 13](#)), salvation (chap. 14), and sanctity (chap. 15).

Sin ([Lev. 13:1-46](#); [14:1-32](#))

Since infection made a person ceremonially unclean, God appointed the priests to act as His examiners to determine whether the victim was "unclean" and therefore had to be separated from the rest of the camp. The person being examined could be isolated for as long as two weeks to give the disease a chance to change for better or for worse. The symptoms might involve swelling and a rash ([13:1-8](#)); swelling, whiteness, and raw flesh ([vv. 9-17](#)); boils ([vv. 18-23](#)); burns ([vv. 24-28](#)); and various skin eruptions ([vv. 29-44](#)). Not everything that looked like leprosy actually was leprosy, and it would be cruel to isolate somebody who wasn't actually infected.

Note also that the investigation included not only persons ([vv. 1-46](#)), but also clothing ([vv. 47-59](#)) and even houses ([14:33-57](#)). Here the priest was looking for a mildew or fungus that, if allowed to spread, could do serious damage. Once Israel was in their land, these fungi could even destroy their crops ([Deut. 28:22](#); [Amos 4:9](#)).

Since disease is an illustration of sin in the Bible, as you read these verses, you will learn a great deal about the "symptoms" of sin.

***Sin is "deeper than the skin"*** ([13:3-4](#), [25](#), [30-32](#), [34](#)). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" ([Jer. 17:9](#)) The word translated "wicked" in this verse means "sick"; the NIV translates it "beyond cure." Sin is not a surface problem that can be solved with simple remedies, like trying to cure cancer with hand lotion. Sin comes from within, from fallen human nature; unless the heart is changed, there can be no solving of the sin problem. "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" ([Rom. 7:18](#), NKJV). Those who talk about the "innate goodness of man" know neither the Bible nor their own hearts.

In eighteenth-century England, if you were convicted for stealing, the judge could order the authorities to chop off your right hand. If you were convicted a second time, they could cut off the left hand. I recall reading about a pickpocket who lost both hands but managed to succeed in his career because he perfected picking pockets *with his teeth!* Even if the authorities had pulled all his teeth, it wouldn't have solved the problem, because sin is deeper than the skin. Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man" ([Matt. 15:19-20](#)).

In Jeremiah's day, the false prophets were like physicians who lied to their patients and refused to give them bad news. "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" ([Jer. 6:14](#)). The medical profession today would

discipline a doctor who did that, but the practice is perfectly acceptable for humanistic counselors, liberal preachers and professors, politicians, and newspaper columnists. People still believe the "progress myth" that people are good and are making themselves and the world better and better day by day.

***Sin spreads*** ([13:5-8](#), [22-23](#), [27-28](#), [32](#), [34-36](#), [51](#), [53](#), [55](#), [57](#); [14:39](#), [44](#), [48](#)). True leprosy ("Hansen's disease") affects the skin and the nerve endings; as it spreads, it produces nodules and ulcers. The tissues then contract and the limbs become deformed. What begins as one sore gradually spreads and turns the whole body into a mass of corruption and ugliness. How like sin! "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" ([James 1:15](#), NKJV).

Our first parents were thieves. Their son Cain was a liar and a murderer. From that small beginning, sin spread so as to corrupt and enslave the whole human race. By the time God sent the Flood, the earth was *filled* with wickedness, evil, violence, and corruption ([Gen. 6:5](#), [11-13](#)); and things haven't become any better since then. Scientific progress has made life more comfortable, but it hasn't made the world less corrupt. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" ([Isa. 1:5-6](#), NKJV).

For nearly fifty years, Alexander Whyte preached God's Word at Free St. George's Church in Edinburgh, Scotland, and gained a reputation for exposing the sins of the human heart and bringing them under the scrutiny of the Word of God. "Surgical preaching" people called it. At one time, he had an assistant named Hugh Black who preached at the evening service and was much more liberal and optimistic in his message. The congregation said they were blackened by Whyte on Sunday mornings and whitewashed by Black on Sunday evenings!

But when the church has a superficial view of sin, this attitude affects everything the church believes and does. If men and women are basically good and not sinners under the wrath of God, then why preach the Gospel? Why send out missionaries? For that matter, why did Jesus even die on the cross? If people are good, then what they need is counseling and consoling, not convicting; we should give them encouragement, not evangelism.

***Sin defiles*** ([vv. 44-46](#)). The word "unclean" is used fifty-four times in [Leviticus 13-15](#). It describes the ceremonial defilement that makes the victim unfit for social life or for participation in worship at the house of God. The Prophet Isaiah confessed that he was "a man of unclean lips" ([Isa. 6:5](#)), and then he spoke for all of us when he wrote, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" ([64:6](#)). Whatever sin touches, it defiles; only the blood of Jesus Christ can wash away that defilement ([1 Cor. 6:9-11](#); [1 John 1:7](#); [Rev. 1:5](#)).

When you read [Psalm 51](#), David's prayer of confession, you can't help but notice how his sins defiled every part of his being: his eyes ([v. 3](#)), his mind ([v. 6](#)), his ears ([v. 8](#)), his bones ([v. 8](#)), his heart ([v. 10](#)), and his mouth ([vv. 13-15](#)). His hands were stained with Uriah's blood ([v. 14](#)), and all he could do was throw himself on the mercy of God and cry out, "Wash me!" ([vv. 2, 7](#))

***Sin isolates (v. 46).*** What solemn words: "He is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be." He had to tear his clothes, put a covering on his upper lip, cry "Unclean, unclean!" whenever anybody approached him, and remain outside the camp until either he died or was healed. "Free among the dead" is the way Heman described it in [Psalm 88:5](#). God struck King Azariah (Uzziah) with leprosy, and he had to dwell in a "separate house," literally "a free house," which was isolated from everybody else ([2 Kings 15:5](#), NIV). He was free—among the dead!

If you've done any witnessing, you've probably met people who seem to have no concept of the tragedy of sin and the awfulness of hell. "I don't mind going to hell," they say rather flippantly. "I'll have lots of company." But there is no company in hell, because hell is a place of eternal isolation and loneliness. Like the lepers outside the camp, lost sinners will dwell alone; they will be alone forever.

***Sin is fit only for the fire (vv. 52, 55, 57)*** A defiled garment was to be burned in the fire; it was not to be purified but destroyed. When Jesus spoke about hell, He used the word *gehenna*, which referred to the garbage dump outside Jerusalem "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" ([Mark 9:44](#); see [Isa. 66:24](#)). Hell is God's eternal garbage dump prepared for the devil and his angels ([Matt. 25:41](#)) and for those who follow the devil by rejecting Jesus Christ. It's a lake of fire ([Rev. 19:20](#); [21:10, 14-15](#)) where Satan and his associates will suffer forever along with people whose names were not found in the Book of Life because they hadn't trusted Jesus Christ and been born again into God's family.

The consequences of leprosy were temporal, but the consequences of sin are eternal. The Jews knew no cure for leprosy, but there is a remedy for sin—faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. Have you trusted Him? If you have, are you telling others the good news that they don't have to be lepers and live forever in the fiery garbage dump of hell?

Salvation (Lev. 14:1-32)

I find it discouraging to read chapter 13, with its emphasis on uncleanness and isolation. But chapter 14 brings us that happy ray of hope that we need: A leper can be cleansed and restored! We need the bad news of judgment before we can appreciate the good news of salvation.

The Jews had no cure for leprosy. Thus, if the victim became well, it was a gift of God's mercy and grace. "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet," said Jesus, "and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" ([Luke 4:27](#)). "Salvation is of the Lord" ([Jonah 2:9](#)). If we aren't saved by God's grace, then we aren't saved at all; for nobody deserves to be saved.

The steps in the leper's cleansing and restoration picture to us what Jesus Christ has done for sinners.

***The priest goes to the leper (vv. 1-3).*** Since the unclean leper wasn't permitted to enter the camp, the priest had to go outside the camp to minister to him or her. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" ([Luke 19:10](#)). When He ministered here on earth, Jesus

was called "a friend of publicans and sinners" ([Luke 7:34](#)); He compared Himself to a doctor helping his needy patients ([Matt. 9:10-13](#)). As God's Great Physician, Jesus makes "house calls" and comes to sinners right where they are. In the case of the Jewish leper, the priest went out to investigate and determine if indeed the victim was healed; but Jesus comes to us that He might heal us of the sickness of sin.

***The victim offers the two birds*** ([yv. 4-7](#)). This unusual ritual pictures to us what Christ did to save a lost world. Birds don't belong in clay jars; they belong in the heavens. Jesus came down from heaven and became a man ([John 3:13, 31; 6:38, 42](#)). As it were, He put Himself into a clay jar so that He might die for our sins. The running water over which the bird was killed reminds us of the Holy Spirit of God ([John 7:37-39](#)), for Jesus offered Himself to God "through the eternal Spirit" ([Heb. 9:14](#)). When the blood-stained living bird was turned loose, it pictured our Lord's resurrection; for the resurrection of Christ is as much a part of the Gospel message as is His death ([1 Cor. 15:1-4](#)). Only a living Savior can save dead sinners.

The blood of the bird that was sacrificed was in the jar and on the living bird, but it also had to be applied to the healed leper. Using the hyssop ([Ex. 12:22; Ps. 51:7](#)), the priest sprinkled the blood on the leper seven times and then pronounced the leper clean. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" ([Heb. 9:22](#)). How did the victim know he was clean? The priest told him so! How do believers today know that God has saved us? He tells us so in His Word! No matter how the leper felt or what he looked like, God said he was clean, and that settled it.

***The person cleanses himself*** ([yv. 8-9](#)). On the day of his cleansing, he had to wash himself and his garments and shave off all his hair. He was then permitted to enter the camp, but he wasn't allowed to enter his tent. He had to stay outside for another week.

Why wash when the priest had already pronounced him clean? Because he had to apply *personally* what God said was true *positionally*. The man was ceremonially clean and had the *right* to live in the camp, but he needed to be made personally and practically clean so he would be *fit* to live in the camp. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean" ([Isa. 1:17](#), NKJV). "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" ([2 Cor. 7:1](#)). Perhaps Paul had [Leviticus 14](#) in mind when he compared the new life in Christ to a change of clothes ([Col. 3:1-14](#)).

***The person cleanses himself again*** ([v. 9](#)). This takes place a week later. The man had to wash, shave his body again, and put on clean clothes. The dual shaving left his skin like that of a baby, perhaps symbolizing a new birth. The shaving and washing didn't kill the germs of leprosy—God had done that—but they symbolized the newness of life that had come to the former leper.

***The person offered the required sacrifices*** ([yv. 10-32](#)). It's now the eighth day since the priest first visited the leper, and eight is the number of the new beginning. The cleansed leper must bring to the door of the tabernacle a male lamb for a trespass (guilt) offering, a male lamb for a burnt offering, a ewe lamb for a sin offering, as well as fine flour and oil for a meal offering.

On the basis of these sacrifices, the priest had pronounced the man clean ([Lev. 14:7](#)), because these sacrifices picture the person and work of Jesus Christ. The sin offering shows Christ

atoning for a person's sin. The trespass offering reminds us that Christ paid the debt we owed to God because, like the leper, we were unable to serve Him during our days of uncleanness. In the burnt offering, the man dedicated himself completely to God, and the meal offering displayed the perfections of Christ accepted for the imperfections of the worshiper.

The unique thing about this ceremony is that *the priest treated the cleansed leper like a fellow priest!* He put the blood of the trespass offering on the man's right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. He sprinkled oil on the man seven times and then put the oil on the blood that was already on his ear, thumb, and toe. After that, he poured the oil on the man's head. This is similar to the ceremony Moses used when he ordained Aaron and his sons (chap. 8). What grace that God should treat a former leper like a priest! Six times in this section the Lord declares that the priest "made atonement" for the man ([vv. 18-21](#), [29-31](#)), which means that his sins were forgiven.

Since the leper had been an outcast, unable to work and earn money, perhaps he wasn't able to bring all three animals for sacrifices. Thus God permitted the poorer man to bring birds for the sin offering and the burnt offering ([vv. 21-23](#), [30-31](#)). In addition, the Lord didn't require any restitution along with the trespass offering. God makes it as easy as possible for sinners to be forgiven and restored. But sinners act as if salvation is so difficult, that they can't possibly respond to God's call.

Sanctity (Lev. 15:1-33)

The key word in this chapter is "issue," used twenty-four times. It simply means a flow of liquid, whether water in nature or a fluid discharged from the human body. The human discharge maybe natural ([vv. 16-18](#), [25-30](#)) or unnatural ([vv. 1-15](#), [19-24](#)), but it's still considered unclean and must be dealt with according to the law of God. Personal hygiene and God's concern for women are certainly involved in these regulations, but the main thrust seems to be that of enforcing personal sanctity. Not everybody is a leper, but all of us have occasional "discharges" that defile us and could defile others.

***Unnatural male discharges*** ([vv. 1-15](#)). These could be anything from diarrhea to discharges caused by a venereal disease such as gonorrhea. Anything the afflicted man touched or spat upon was unclean. In fact, those defiled by touching him had to wash themselves and their clothes, and they remained unclean until evening. Clay vessels that he touched were to be broken and wooden vessels washed. The possibility of infection was taken very seriously.

By the goodness of the Lord, the man with a discharge could get well; when that happened, he had to wait a week and, like the cleansed leper, wash himself and his clothes. On the eighth day, he brought a sin offering and a burnt offering, but he wasn't required to bring expensive sacrifices, since a bodily discharge wasn't as serious as leprosy. After that, the man was free to worship the Lord and live a normal life in the camp.

In recent years, we've heard a good deal about "toxic people" and even "toxic churches." Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton have written a book called *Toxic Faith* (Oliver/Nelson, 1991) that describes "cultic" churches and the religious addiction they quietly spread among unsuspecting people. The image is a biblical one, for Jesus warned about people like the Pharisees who

pretended to be holy but were really transmitting defilement to the people who followed them ([Matt. 23:25-28](#)). In fact, Paul wrote about people in his own day whose religion was "toxic." "Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene" ([2 Tim. 2:16-17](#), NIV).

**Natural male discharges** ([vv. 16-18](#)). This paragraph doesn't even suggest that sexual intercourse within marriage is impure or defiling. As the traditional marriage ceremony puts it, "God established marriage for the blessing and benefit of mankind." Within the holy and loving bonds of marriage, the husband doesn't defile his wife nor the wife her husband. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" ([Heb. 13:4](#), NIV).

Moses is dealing here with *ceremonial* uncleanness, not moral uncleanness. Since intercourse involves bodily fluids, and bodily fluids made a person unclean, the husband and wife had to take pains to wash themselves and maintain ceremonial purity. Perhaps the Lord is telling us that, even in a beautiful experience like married love, there is opportunity for our sinful nature to go to work and defile it. The Jewish couple had to consider God as well as their own desires, and this helped sanctify their relationship. No sacrifices were required for their cleansing, only washing in water. Thus there was no sin that needed to be atoned for.

**Natural female discharges** ([vv. 19-24](#)). Once again, God wasn't condemning or punishing the woman for experiencing her normal monthly period, because He made her that way so she could bear children. This regulation declares only that the woman's discharge made her unclean and therefore she could make others unclean. Rachel used this ploy when she deceived her father about his household gods ([Gen. 31:26-35](#)).

During the time of her period and for a week afterward, a woman was unclean and had to be careful where she sat and slept and what she touched. But this confinement was a blessing in disguise since it allowed her to enjoy rest and quiet when she needed it most. If her husband was too aggressive sexually, this law kept him from taking advantage of her at a time when intercourse wouldn't be especially pleasant to her. If he forced himself on her, both he and the marriage bed would be unclean for a week, and this would separate him from everybody in the family and the camp! It wasn't worth it.

Certainly God created sex for pleasure as well as for procreation, but pleasure that isn't disciplined soon becomes bondage and then torture. Unmarried people must exercise self-control lest they commit fornication and invite the judgment of God ([Heb. 13:4](#)), but married people also need self-control lest they take advantage of one another and leave God out of their most intimate relationship. God created sex, and wise is the person who permits the Creator to make the rules.

**Unnatural female discharges** ([vv. 25-33](#)). A prolonged hemorrhage would be both physically painful and religiously disastrous, for the woman would be perpetually unclean. The unknown woman who came to Jesus for help had suffered with this affliction for twelve years ([Mark 5:25-34](#); [Luke 8:43-48](#)). Strictly speaking, everybody she touched in that big crowd was defiled by her whether they knew it or not; when she touched our Lord's garment, He was also defiled. How

gracious of Him to heal her and give back to her the normal life she longed for! The ritual for her cleansing reminds us of the ritual for the restoration of a mother after the birth of a baby ([Lev. 12:6-7](#)).

These regulations for personal sanctity weren't just pious suggestions from the religious leaders of the nation. They were holy commandments from the Lord, and it was a serious thing to disobey them ([15:31-33](#)). For an unclean person to go to the tabernacle would be to defile the tabernacle and invite judgment ([v. 31](#)). God warned the Israelites that a violation of the law given in [Leviticus 15:24](#) would cause the couple to be "cut off from among their people" ([20:18](#)). Whether "cut off" meant death (it's used that way in [Gen. 9:11](#)) or excommunication, commentators don't agree, but whatever the penalty was, it was serious.

God's people today don't live under the threat of such judgments, although "there is a sin unto death" ([1 John 5:16](#); see [1 Cor. 11:30](#)). But there should be no area in our lives from which God is excluded, and every relationship should be under His control.

His words to us are still, "Be holy, for I am holy!"

Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Holy (Leviticus).

## Eating for God's Glory.

### Leviticus 11:1-47

**Main Idea:** God rules over every part of our lives, including what we eat, and we give Him glory by our willingness to be different from the world and submitting to Him.

- I. **We Submit to God and His Word.**
- II. **We Separate from the Ways of the World.**
- III. **We Seek to Reflect God's Holiness.**
- IV. **We Celebrate the Fulfillment of the Law by Jesus.**
  - A. Jesus provides redemption.
  - B. Jesus provides purification.
  - C. Jesus provides direction.

As recent as 40 years ago, the phrase "eating disorder" was virtually unknown. The only eating disorder people commonly addressed was eating too much! Of course, that problem is still with us, but we now have others. One of the newer ways the brokenness of humanity is surfacing is

the proliferation of eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating. Our fallenness negatively affects our relationships with God, with other people, with ourselves, and with the world around us, including the food we eat.

Just as sin affects every area of our lives, God gave laws to His people governing every area of life. All His laws convey the cumulative message that God rules over all of life. God's old covenant laws governing the diet of His people are fairly well-known. Most people who have read Leviticus know of these laws. Also, people who have read the New Testament know about Jewish dietary regulations since Jesus and Paul referred to them. Many people who have not read the Bible are familiar with Old Testament dietary regulations because observant Jews still base their diets on such laws. They eat only "kosher" food, though the word "kosher" is a rabbinic Hebrew word that does not occur in the Old Testament.

So a lot of people know about the existence of these laws, but not many people have thought about their meaning and their application to the church. Actually, [Leviticus 11](#) applies to our lives in important and practical ways. In fact, when some readers see the title of this section, "Eating for God's Glory," they may think the subject will be *too* practical and may wish they had not eaten that second piece before they began reading! We will summarize the exposition and application of these laws with four statements.

## **We Submit to God and His Word**

Probably the most common question regarding the Levitical dietary regulations is, Why? Why are those particular foods prohibited, and why are those particular foods allowed? Is there something about the foods that made them inherently acceptable or unacceptable for consumption? Some have answered the "Why?" question by referring to health factors. Pork, for example, is the source of trichinosis—avoid pork, avoid trichinosis. A few years after Sharon and I were married, we went through a phase of eating according to Levitical law. We never thought it was required for Christians, but we read a book that claimed a biblical diet is a healthy diet, and we probably thought it was cool. It wasn't that difficult; we had not been eating much vulture or lizard. However, the health standard cannot be applied to all the foods listed in [Leviticus 11](#). Quite a few of the prohibited foods are not unhealthy. It seems unlikely that health was the reason some foods were permitted and other foods were forbidden.

Other interpreters have pointed out that the animals listed in [Leviticus 11](#) are divided into the same categories in which they were created. The first chapter of Genesis divides the animals into sea animals, sky animals/birds, land animals, and animals that creep on the ground. God's laws in [Leviticus 11](#) divide the animals into those four categories too. Some interpreters take their cue from that parallel and say that the forbidden foods of [Leviticus 11](#) are forbidden because their appearance does not conform to the creation order. For example, fish that don't have fins or scales are unusual; they appear to defy their proper form and kind. Therefore, God did not permit His people to consume that type of animal. Such a theory is interesting, but not all the forbidden foods violate creation order or form. Also, that theory seems to imply that the animals with unusual forms are somehow inferior, but God made them that way, so why would God say in [Leviticus 11](#) that something is wrong with them? It seems likely He would not say that; God

made these animals and He said they are good. Therefore, a violation of creation order is probably not the reason God commanded His people not to eat these foods.

The explanation for the existence of the dietary laws is at least two-fold. The first of our four statements supplies the first reason—we submit to God and His Word. Why was it important for God’s people in the old covenant to eat the foods God commanded and refrain from eating the foods God commanded them not to eat? The reason is that God said so. When God commands, His people obey. In order to obey, all God’s people need to know is that God commands.

Sometimes a parent tells a little child to do something, the child asks why, and the parent says, “Because I said so.” The child may stomp his little foot, but then he goes off to do what he’s told to do. Why? He recognizes the authority of the parent. However, as children grow closer to adulthood they want to know the reason for their parents’ rules. When children are older they have learned that parents make mistakes. Parents tell their children to do things that really aren’t necessary to do, or maybe the older child does not want to obey unless he agrees with the reason. However, when *God* gives a command, His commands are never mistakes. Therefore, the desire to disobey God is never right.

Our relationship with God matures in a different way from our relationship with our parents. The more mature we become in our relationship with God, the more we are willing to obey unexplained commands. Why are mature believers more willing to obey unexplained commands? The better we know God, the more we trust God. When we get to know God, we learn that He is always good, loving, merciful, just, righteous, and gracious. Therefore, we can trust all His commands because we know that they are for our good and for His glory.

The first unexplained command God gave was the command to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. The subject of God’s command to the first man and woman was also food. God told them not to eat from the tree in the midst of the garden. Why not? What was it about that food that caused God to forbid it? God did not explain His command to them; He expected them to obey with no explanation. When the serpent spoke to Eve, he *did* explain God’s command. He told Eve that God had told them not to eat of that particular fruit because “God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” ([Gen 3:5](#)). In other words the serpent claimed God knew that if they ate that fruit they would become wiser and stronger. The serpent implied God did not want them to grow; he suggested that God is an insecure tyrant who wants to keep humanity ignorant and weak. Eve was faced with a choice. Her choice to obey or disobey would be based on whether she trusted God. Instead of trusting God and obeying, she believed the Devil’s lies about God and disobeyed. People have believed the Devil’s lies about God ever since. However, when we put our full trust in God, we are willing to obey His unexplained commands. God’s commands to Israel in [Leviticus 11](#) remind us that we submit to God and His Word.

## **We Separate from the Ways of the World**

It seems likely that this is a second reason for God to give the dietary laws. One result of this special diet was that God’s people would be differentiated from other people groups. Their diet made them different; it was part of their identity. Today, when archaeologists excavate an

ancient site, sometimes they don't know anything about the people who lived in that area. One of the questions they ask is the ethnic identity of the people who lived there. One of the ways they identify the ethnic identity of the people is to look at the garbage piles and cooking areas where people threw the bones of the animals they ate. In the area of Israel, often such piles have no pig bones. When archaeologists find no pig bones, they identify the people who lived there as Jewish. God's people were distinguished by their diet.

For the ancient Israelites, mealtime was a time of family sharing and fellowship with friends. The poor Israelites didn't have televisions to watch during supper, so they had to talk to each other. Mealtime was a time of forging bonds of family and friendship. The people who shared meals together were often determined by ethnicity. The book of Genesis says that the Egyptians did not eat with the Hebrews; eating with the Hebrews was an abomination to the Egyptians ([Gen 43:32](#)). So mealtime brought people together, but it also separated people from other groups.

When God gave His laws about diet to His people, they were in the Sinai wilderness, but He was preparing them to enter the land of Canaan. God told them numerous times that they were not to adopt the ways of the Canaanites. They were not to worship their gods or learn their ways. The Canaanites worshiped idols, practiced every kind of sexual perversion, and offered their children as sacrifices to their false gods. God was bringing His judgment on the Canaanites because their iniquity was complete, and the Israelite conquest of Canaan was the means of His judgment. Once the Israelites inhabited the land of Canaan, God did not want His people to have anything to do with the Canaanites because His people were prone to adopt their ways. One of the ways God was separating His people from the Canaanites was their diet. Since the Israelites had a special diet, they would not share mealtime with the Canaanites. Their diet helped to keep them separate.

Separation from the ways of the world is also a New Testament principle that followers of Jesus are to observe. God commands us to love the people of the world as He loves them. God also commands us not to love the sinful ways of the world. [First John 2:15-16](#) says,

*Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For everything that belongs to the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's lifestyle—is not from the Father, but is from the world.*

If we love and worship God and follow His ways, we will not love the ways of the world. A separation will always exist between followers of Jesus and those who do not know Him. We're separated from the world because God, His kingdom, and His righteousness are most important to us, and those are not most important to the world. We are also separated from the world by our lifestyle, just as the Israelites were separated from other people by their diet. We love every person in the world, but we don't participate in the ways of the world.

If you're a follower of Jesus and you're not separate from the ways of the world, then separate yourself right now. If you're doing something that is not pleasing to Jesus, then stop it. Maybe you're a new Christian, or maybe you're being confronted with some of the ways of the world for the first time. As a Christian, the Master of your life is Jesus, not the world or anything the

world worships. Followers of Jesus live the way Jesus tells us to live. Take to heart what [2 Corinthians 6](#) says to Christians.

*Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? . . . Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. ([vv. 14-15,17](#))*

Clearly God intends for us to be different, even separate from the world. Just as the Israelites observed a special diet that distinguished them from the rest of the world, we observe a holy lifestyle that separates us from unbelievers. We feel pressure from the world to conform to its ways, but we do not give in to that pressure.

Several years ago, my wife's parents were generous to the families of their two daughters and took all of us on a cruise together. One of our ports of call was Jamaica. I was walking along a sidewalk in a city in Jamaica. Other family members were behind me; I'm a fast walker, and I had gone on ahead. A car was parallel parked next to the sidewalk, and the door to the car was open. As I approached the car with the open door, a man in the car said to me, "Do you want to buy some weed?"

I could tell by the way he was talking that he was trying to go unnoticed and unheard by other people, and I didn't understand him at first, so I said, "Excuse me?"

He said, "Hey, man, do you want to buy some weed?"

I said, "Some what? Oh!" I said, "You mean marijuana! You're trying to sell me some marijuana!" To be honest, I was fascinated by that. At that point, I had lived 40 plus years and nobody had ever tried to sell me marijuana. So when this man tried to offer some to me, I was astonished. I asked him, "Really? You're trying to sell marijuana to *me*? Do I look like the kind of person who would be interested in buying marijuana?" He looked nonplussed, but I continued. "What is it about me or my appearance that made you think that I'm the kind of person who would ever smoke marijuana?" By this time, some family members were approaching, and I said to them, loudly enough so as many people as possible could hear me, "This guy is trying to sell marijuana to me. Can you believe it? Nobody has ever tried to sell marijuana to me." Of course the guy closed his door and drove away.

When the world pressures us to adopt its ways, shouldn't we ask a similar question: When you look at followers of Jesus, what about us makes you think we would ever be interested in adopting the ways of the world? Our God has redeemed us, and He calls us to be different. Do we look like the kind of people who would want to be like this culture? In this culture murder and rape are so common that ours is one of the most violent societies in the world. Families are fragmenting at an unprecedented rate. Multiple teenagers are attempting suicide every day. Depression and chronic stress are so common that sedatives and antacids are the most common drugs sold over the counter. Why would we want to conform to this culture? Before we met Jesus, we experienced that misery and sin. God delivered us, and He is in the process of

transforming us so that we will indeed be different. Why would we want to go back? We wisely separate from the ways of the world.

## We Seek to Reflect God's Holiness

God did not tell His people why He chose those particular foods to be designated as clean or unclean. However, He did tell them why He wanted them to be different, holy. In [verses 44](#) and 45 God said twice, "Be holy because I am holy." Why are we to be holy? Because God is holy, and He wants us to be like Him. We're to be holy as God is holy. God created us in His image, but the image of God has been marred by sin. The image of God begins to be restored in us when we're reconciled to God by Jesus and we embrace God and His ways. As we put away sin and draw close to Him, we become holy for He is holy.

In [verse 45](#) God says, "I am Yahweh, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy." Note the sequence. First, God redeemed them from slavery, then He was their God, then He told them to be holy. The sequence is important, and the same sequence applies today. First, God redeems us. He saves us from sin when we put our faith in Jesus; He comes into our lives and makes us new people by giving us a new nature. Then God tells us, Now that you're different, act differently. Jesus has made you into new people; act like new people. Be who you are. In your daily life, live out your new identity in Jesus. Be holy.

Compare our salvation and sanctification in Jesus to a wedding and marriage. Before my wife and I were married, we read books together about how to be a Christian husband and wife. We went to pre-marital counseling. We purchased a topical Bible and read aloud all the verses in the Bible that have to do with marriage. Relatively speaking, we were prepared for marriage. However, we were not married until after the wedding ceremony. Just so, people can know a lot about Christianity, but they are not Christians until they personally put their faith in Jesus as Savior. After our wedding ceremony, we were married. We were never going to be ignorant of marriage again, and we were never going to be more married than we were at that moment. We were married, just like people who put their faith in Jesus are saved and reconciled to God. However, I quickly learned that there is more to being a good husband than good preparation and a good wedding. I had to start acting like a married person. The wedding ceremony gave me a new identity—the identity of husband—but once I had that identity I had to start behaving like a husband. I have to be what I am. It's one thing to be married and to know you're married; it's another thing to *act* married.

It's the same in becoming holy, as God is holy. When we put our faith in Jesus, God forgives our sin, gives us the gift of eternal life, and He makes us new people. He gives us a new identity—we're children of God, heirs with Jesus, saints. We're holy ones from the moment of our salvation. From that moment we'll never be unsaved again, and we'll never be more saved than we are at that moment. Becoming holy is the process of becoming who we are. When we come to Jesus, God sets us apart as His, and becoming holy means that we live as those who have been set apart as God's. That's the process of sanctification, becoming holy as He is holy. God said, "I am Yahweh, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy." We seek to reflect God's holiness.

# We Celebrate the Fulfillment of the Law by Jesus

In [Matthew 5:17](#) Jesus said, “Don’t assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. When we looked at the first chapters of Leviticus, we saw that Jesus fulfilled every type of sacrifice, so sacrifices are no longer necessary for God’s people. Jesus is the final, once-for-all sacrifice. How does Jesus fulfill the laws in [Leviticus 11](#)?

## Jesus Provides Redemption

God set Israel free from slavery in Egypt. That is redemption. Jesus sets us free from slavery to the Devil, the flesh, and the world. Like former slaves, we are free! Jesus, God the Son, said in [John 8:36](#), “If the Son sets you free, you really will be free.” As John Donne, the English poet, wrote to the Lord, “Except you enthrall me, [I] never shall be free” (“Holy Sonnet XIV”). Knowing the truth of Jesus’ words also makes us free. Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” ([John 8:31-32](#)). Praise His name, knowing His truth gives us freedom from sin, self, and Satan!

## Jesus Provides Purification

[Leviticus 11](#) says that if an Israelite touched an unclean animal or a dead animal, that person would become unclean. However, the unclean person need not remain unclean. He could wash his clothes and would be regarded as clean the next day ([vv. 25,27-28,31-32,40](#)). In other words, in the old covenant period, God provided directions to become clean. In the new covenant period, Jesus cleanses us. Jesus described our salvation in Him as washing. One night in an upper room in Jerusalem, Jesus washed the feet of His apostles. Peter was reluctant to let Jesus wash his feet, since washing feet was the job of a slave. Jesus said to Peter, “If I don’t wash you, you have no part with Me” ([John 13:8](#)). In other words, “To be right with Me, Peter, to have a share in My kingdom, you must let Me wash you.”

All of us are unclean in God’s sight. We are unworthy to be in His presence. Thank God when we come to Him in faith and ask Him to come into our lives, He washes us! That happens when God first reconciles us to Himself, and it happens in the Christian life as He cleanses us from sin. [First John 1:9](#) says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When we confess our sins, God forgives our sins, *and* He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. He does both of those. The song “Rock of Ages” expresses that truth. It says, “Be of sin the double cure / Save from wrath and make me pure.” The double cure—He saves us from His righteous wrath, and He makes us pure. He redeems us and cleanses us. By our sin we earned God’s punishment. Jesus took that punishment on Himself when He died for our sin on the cross. When we put our faith in Him, He takes away our sin, our guilt, and God’s wrath. Then, on a daily basis, He forgives us and washes us.

## Jesus Provides Direction

[Leviticus 11](#) shows that in the old covenant period God gave His people dietary regulations—some foods were clean and other foods were unclean. In the new covenant period in which we

live, those regulations no longer apply. [Colossians 2:16-17](#) says, “Don’t let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink. . . . These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is the Messiah.” Paul was telling the Christians in Colossae not to allow anybody to push them into following old covenant regulations regarding diet, and [1 Corinthians 10:27](#) says explicitly, “Eat everything that is set before you, without raising questions of conscience.”

So the old covenant dietary regulations no longer apply, but in the new covenant Jesus does give us direction regarding food. We don’t observe those directions in the hope of becoming one of His followers. No, He redeems us by His grace through our faith. He gives us new and eternal life as a free gift. Then, once He is in our lives, He changes us on the inside so that we want to follow His directions.

Let’s note four directions Jesus gives us in this new covenant age.

*We use mealtime as a mission.* The New Testament says Jesus ate with prostitutes, outcasts, and notorious sinners like tax collectors. He was criticized for it, but it was part of His strategy of drawing sinners to salvation. Zacchaeus is a famous example. As Jesus passed through Jericho, He wanted to lead Zacchaeus to faith in Him. How did Jesus do that? He invited him to lunch. Once I heard a former Muslim talk about how to reach Muslims for Jesus. Someone asked him about the best strategy to build relationships. His answer was one word: “Food.” Followers of Jesus are separate from the ways of the world, and we do not yoke ourselves to unbelievers in formal relationships like marriage ([2 Cor 6:14-15,17](#)). However, for followers of Jesus, food is not used to segregate us from the world; food is used to invite the world to us so we can reach them for Jesus. Use mealtime as a mission.

*We use food to promote fellowship.* Jesus gave us a symbol to help us to remember what He did for us on the cross, and the symbol He gave us is a meal—the Lord’s Supper. We often refer to the Lord’s Supper as “Communion” because during the Lord’s Supper we experience fellowship with Jesus in the context of kinship with our brothers and sisters in the faith. It is a communal meal. The second chapter of Acts records the salvation of 3,000 people on the Day of Pentecost. After they came to faith in Jesus, they began to meet together. [Acts 2:42-47](#) describes what they did when they gathered with one another.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.*

*Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.*

Twice those verses state that the first Christians were sharing meals with one another. They ate together “every day,” “from house to house,” and “with a joyful attitude.” If we patterned the contemporary church after the early church, wouldn’t we get together in homes to share food

more often? The apostle Paul also wrote in 1 Corinthians about Christians sharing meals with one another. Today, a growing number of churches are using the ministry strategy of small groups. Church members meet in homes for Bible study, Bible application, and fellowship. They share snacks or meals together. They get to know one another as they share food. They “do life” together. Why shouldn’t we do that? Jesus and the early church did it. We use food to promote fellowship.

*We stop consumption that causes stumbling.* In [chapters 8](#) and [10](#) of 1 Corinthians Paul wrote about eating meat offered to idols. Some Christians thought that eating meat used in idol worship made them guilty of participating in idolatry. In [1 Corinthians 8](#) Paul explained that was not true. It was fine to eat meat offered to idols; the idols were nothing. However, he told the Christians in Corinth that they should abstain from eating meat offered to idols if that consumption caused other believers to stumble in their faith.

This is the principle: helping people know and follow Jesus is more important than whether we get to eat what we want, even if what we want is as great as a chocolate donut. People are more important. We do not want to bruise their faith or cause them to stumble. Therefore, we force ourselves to ask hard questions about our eating habits. Do we eat too much? When others see the extra pounds we are carrying, how does that reflect on Jesus and His power in our lives? Could they say, “Does Jesus have the power to deliver His people from gluttony? Evidently not.” How does our over-eating reflect on our discipline? Many church leaders are overweight, and some badly so. Shouldn’t spiritual leaders be disciplined in their personal lives? Obesity is an advertisement for lack of discipline in eating. I write such words in great humility, realizing that I fail in my eating habits regularly. Still, thinking of how our eating affects others should cause us to restrain and discipline ourselves for God’s glory. We stop consumption that causes stumbling.

*We subject eating to higher priorities.* The fourth chapter of the Gospel of John records that when Jesus and His disciples arrived in the Samaritan village of Sychar, Jesus sat down at a well and His disciples went to get some food. While the disciples were gone, Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman, and when the disciples returned they offered Jesus some food. Jesus told them, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.” The disciples didn’t know what He was talking about, and Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” ([vv. 31-34](#)). Jesus was saying to them, “Gentlemen, you’ve been getting some food because that’s what is important to you. I’ve been talking with this woman about her relationship to God because that’s what is important to Me. Doing God’s work is what feeds Me.” That’s was Jesus’ priority. In [Matthew 6](#) He told us to make that our priority:

*So don’t worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. ([vv. 31-33](#))*

Jesus was telling us to stop prioritizing food and start prioritizing “the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” Furthermore, when God and His kingdom are our priorities and food is not, the way we eat will change. We won’t commit the sin of gluttony, because food is just not that

important to us. Sharing Jesus with the lost and encouraging our brothers and sisters in the faith is important to us. Eating too much won't help that mission and may hurt it, so we discipline ourselves. We exercise by pushing away from the table. Also, when we prioritize God's kingdom and righteousness, we won't be obsessed with our appearance. That healthy relationship with God, others, ourselves, and food should eliminate the possibility of developing an eating disorder. Our priority is God and His righteousness, not our appearance.

The old covenant distinctions between clean and unclean foods no longer apply in the new covenant in Jesus. However, one way we will be marked as followers of Jesus is the way we relate to food. In 1 Corinthians, in the midst of that discussion about eating meat offered to idols, Paul laid down this principle in [1 Corinthians 10:31](#), "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory." We were created for the glory of God, and we were re-created in Christ to give glory to God in everything we do, including how we eat and drink.

## Reflect and Discuss

1. Why was it important for God's people in the old covenant to obey His commands concerning food?
2. Are you willing to obey unexplained commands from God's Word? What does this tell you about your relationship with God?
3. How did Israelite mealtimes bring some people together while separating other people?
4. According to [Leviticus 11:44-45](#), why are we to be holy?
5. How does God enable us to be holy?
6. How does Jesus fulfill the laws in [Leviticus 11](#)?
7. Why do the old covenant dietary regulations no longer apply?
8. How can you use mealtime as a mission?
9. According to [Acts 2:42-47](#), how did the early church approach mealtime? What can we learn from this?
10. How would your eating habits change if God and His kingdom were your priorities?

## God Rules from Our Birth.

### Leviticus 12:1-8

**Main Idea:** God is the sovereign ruler over every detail of our lives from birth, He calls us into a covenant relationship with Him in which we are separate from the sinful ways of the world, and He provides atonement for our sin so we can be clean and relate to Him.

- I. **God Commands Celebration of Childbirth.**
- II. **God Requires Separation from Unbelievers.**
  - A. Worship separates us.
  - B. Truth separates us.
  - C. Obedience separates us.
- III. **God States the Stipulations of His Covenant.**

- IV. **God Provides Propitiation for Our Sin.**
- V. **God Offers Salvation to All.**

When we read a chapter like [Leviticus 12](#) that addresses childbirth and uncleanness after childbirth, we ask questions like, What do we do with that? Why is it in the Bible? Is it important? What does it mean to us? What difference does it make? It is also especially challenging for a man to preach a sermon on experiences only women have, like childbirth and menstruation. Through the years I have preached from the various genres in the Bible—psalms, prophecy, Wisdom literature, New Testament letters, narratives, apocalyptic literature, and parables. But the legal sections of Leviticus like [chapter 12](#) present a different kind of challenge. When I preached through Leviticus, I feel like a juggler who has juggled all kinds of objects for years, and one day someone asks, “I wonder if he can juggle chain saws?” When I agree to attempt it and make it through the first 11 chapters, someone else says, “Let’s crank the chain saws and see what happens!” As I prepared to preach on childbirth and what happens after childbirth, I knew it could go badly in several different ways. Part of me just wanted to get through it without hurting myself.

I also thought of the truck driver I heard about who had attended a week-long class on truck driving. At the end of the week the teacher gave a final exam, and the exam consisted of one question. The question was, “You’re driving down a steep road that winds around a mountain and has numerous hairpin curves. Just beyond the edge of the road, the shoulder is a cliff that drops for hundreds of feet, and the road has no guard rail. As you are descending that steep road, you lose your brakes. What do you do?” The truck driver taking the exam wrote just one sentence as an answer—“I would wake up Bubba.” The teacher saw his answer and asked him why he wrote it. The truck driver said, “Bubba and I drive together. When Bubba drives, I sleep, and when I drive Bubba sleeps. In that situation I would wake up Bubba because Bubba and I have been driving together a long time, and I know Bubba would want to be awake because he ain’t never seen a wreck as bad as this one is gonna be.”

I, like that truck driver, feared a wreck as I prepared to preach through some of the laws in Leviticus, especially those that are rather explicit. On the contrary, I learned that studying and applying these laws in the context of a new covenant church is actually very helpful for followers of Jesus. As we approach legal sections like this we should remember that [2 Timothy 3:16](#) says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable.” Since [Leviticus 12](#) is included in “all Scripture,” then it is inspired by God and profitable. How is [Leviticus 12](#) profitable to us?

## **God Commands Celebration of Childbirth**

Since Levitical law states that a woman who bore a child was unclean with the result that she could not touch anything holy or come into the sanctuary, some people think these laws carry the message that birth is *not* a cause for celebration. Furthermore, since the woman who gave birth was to offer a *sin* offering, some may think that the process of conception involves sin. However, we should remember two facts. First, in God’s Word childbirth is celebrated. God was the One who commanded reproduction. In [Genesis 1:28](#) God said to the first man and woman, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth.” Some people have said that is the only command God ever gave that humans have consistently obeyed. We have been fruitful and we have multiplied. So

childbirth is the result of obeying God's creation command. Also, [Psalm 127](#) says that children are a heritage from the Lord and a reward. "Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them" ([v. 5](#)). Childbirth is a cause for celebration. In the Old Testament, being without children is a great affliction; childlessness was a form of suffering. The book of Genesis says that Jacob's wife Rachel was barren, and Rachel said, "Give me sons, or I will die!" ([Gen 30:1](#)). When God gave a child to a family, they received that gift as a great blessing.

The second fact we should remember is that in the book of Leviticus the word "unclean" does not always refer to sin. It is certainly not sin here. Uncleanness after childbirth is not the result of sin. Uncleanness was sometimes a moral category, but it was also a ritual category. People became unclean by sin *and* by their association with anything that resembled or represented the realm of death. In the case of childbirth, childbirth involves blood, blood was associated with death, so childbirth rendered women unclean because of the blood. The only blood God allowed in the tabernacle was sacrificial blood, the blood of animals shed for the purpose of atonement. Everything else that had to do with death was kept separate from the tabernacle.

Thus, childbirth rendered a woman ritually unclean but not morally unclean. God commands celebration of childbirth. Viewing pregnancy or the birth of a baby as an inconvenience or an unwanted expense is always against the will of God. The practice of abortion is the result of the opposite way of thinking about the birth of a baby. Instead of celebrating God's gift of new life, those who abort kill God's gift of new life. When they do so they dishonor God's gift and put themselves in the place of God as if they had the authority to give and take life. God's Word always leads us to celebrate pregnancy and the birth of a child as gifts from God. [Psalm 100:3](#) says, "Acknowledge that Yahweh is God. He made us." God makes us; babies are His work and His gift. God commands celebration of childbirth.

Some people are confused that a woman who gave birth to a boy was unclean for 7 days and continued in purification for 33 days, but a woman who gave birth to a girl was unclean for 14 days and continued in purification for 66 days ([Lev 12:2-5](#)). Why did God differentiate in that way between male and female babies? Does this suggest that females are more unclean, or inferior, to males? This last suggestion violates the balance of biblical revelation, so we should reject it. The text offers no explicit explanation for this law, so commentators have had to speculate. Some have attempted to offer a medical explanation based on ancient conceptions. Though this may have been the case, it seems to impose modern scientific categories on the text. A more promising explanation is that since the blood of childbirth renders a woman ritually unclean, the longer period of uncleanness for a baby girl anticipated the baby's own ritual uncleanness when she gives birth in the future. A textual fact to consider that may be significant is that the circumcision of a baby boy was on the eighth day after his birth. If the mother continued in her uncleanness after the seventh day, she would not be able to approach the tabernacle on the eighth day and would thereby miss her son's circumcision. Therefore, perhaps we should not conclude that the period of uncleanness for female babies was longer for an unknown reason, but that the period of uncleanness for male babies was shorter for a known reason—the necessity of obeying God's command to circumcise on the eighth day after birth (Rooker, *Leviticus*, 183–84).

## **God Requires Separation from Unbelievers**

In the last section we saw that one consequence of obedience to the Levitical laws was that God's people would differentiate themselves from other groups. God's people were about to enter Canaan, and God told His people numerous times not to adopt the ways of the Canaanites. The Canaanites worshiped idols and practiced virtually every kind of debauchery. They even practiced child sacrifice. God did not want His people to have anything to do with the Canaanites so that His people would not adopt their ways. God was separating His people from the Canaanites by their diet and by their worship.

### Worship Separates Us

The Canaanites worshiped Baal, and the worship of Baal included blood. [First Kings 18](#) describes the priests of Baal cutting themselves in a worship ritual (v. 28). God's people would also encounter the Moabites, and the Moabites worshiped Molech, sometimes referred to as Milcom. The worship of Molech involved blood because it included human sacrifice. The priests of Molech killed people in the worship of their false god.

So the worship rituals included in the pagan religions of Israel's neighboring cultures involved human blood. In contrast, the one true God declared the worship of His people would be different. The worship of false gods included human blood and death, but the worship of the one true God would include only animal death and would exclude all signs of human death, including blood and disease. It is not saying anything negative about childbirth, child-bearing women, or babies to say that childbirth involves blood and is a form of disease in that it is *dis-ease*. It involves a lot of pain—during pregnancy, during childbirth, and after childbirth. Blood and pain were parts of pagan worship in the ancient world, but God separated His people by giving laws separating human blood, pain, and death from worship. God said to regard women who had given birth recently as unclean because the blood of childbirth brought to mind connotations with the blood of pagan worship.

Worship still separates God's people. False religion still exists in the twenty-first century. Many people worship themselves, but the church of Jesus Christ worships the one true God. Many people worship a hobby, money, notoriety, the body, or a human philosophy, and some people even worship their religious liturgy; but the church of Jesus Christ worships the one true God. Worship separates us. Even when our neighbors see that our cars are not in our driveways on Sunday morning, they know we are worshiping and they are not. A habit of worship separates us from other people.

### Truth Separates Us

In the ancient world the mortality rate in childbirth was much higher than today. Childbirth put women and babies in danger of death. Therefore, ironically, childbirth was associated with death. Anything that was associated with that was not allowed to approach worship because from the beginning God communicated the truth that death is caused by sin. The first sin led to death, and sin has been leading to death ever since. [Romans 6:23](#) says, "The wages of sin is death." Because of death's association with sin, generally anything having to do with death was unclean and God required its separation from worship. Since childbirth was associated with death or the danger of death, God commanded women to stay away from public worship after childbirth.

The fact that death entered the human race through sin is the truth God communicated to humanity. That truth was reflected in the way Israel worshiped. Other religions in the ancient world had no doctrine of original sin or atonement for sin. Still today, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions have no doctrine of original sin. Followers of Jesus are separate from the world because we believe the truth that God has revealed in His Word and in Jesus.

### Obedience Separates Us

Beginning in [Leviticus 11](#), God gave numerous laws to His people. Those laws were comprehensive in that they governed every major area of life—commerce, family, childbirth, religion, clothing, and even diet. God’s laws were so comprehensive that every day, several times each day, God’s people had specific commands to obey regarding what they were doing at that moment. Every time they ate a meal they had to make sure they were eating according to God’s law. When they worked the fields, paid their workers, and related to their neighbors they thought of God’s laws that applied to those activities. Living in that way impressed on all the Israelites that the whole of life is under God’s rule. It was as if God was saying that nothing in their lives was so small that He did not care about it. God is involved in every detail of our lives, He cares about every detail, and every detail is an opportunity to obey God.

Our obedience to the Lord in all things will separate us from unbelievers, and separation from unbelievers is a fundamental principle in the old covenant and in the new covenant. God commands the new covenant followers of Jesus to love the people of the world as He loves them. God also commands us not to love the sinful ways of the world. [First John 2:15-16](#) says,

*Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For everything that belongs to the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s lifestyle—is not from the Father, but is from the world.*

If we love and worship the one true God and follow His ways, we will not love the ways of the world. A separation will always exist between followers of Jesus and those who do not know Jesus. We separate ourselves from the world by our worship, by our belief in the truth, and by our obedience to God’s rules. God requires such separation from unbelievers.

## God States the Stipulations of His Covenant

When we read the detailed laws of Leviticus, we should not forget the covenantal context of those laws. God gave His laws in the context of His covenant relationship with His people, Israel. His rules were stipulations of His covenant, and a covenant exists in the context of a relationship.

The blood of childbirth was not immoral, so keeping it away from worship was not a moral matter. The absence of the blood of childbirth from worship was a relational matter. God said to keep uncleanness away from worship, and if the Israelites failed to obey God they were guilty of rebelling against their covenant relationship with God. Obedience to God’s laws was a relational matter because God’s laws were stipulations of His covenant with His people. In interpreting and applying Leviticus we must always consider the personal, redemptive relationship between God

and the people to whom God gave His law. To disobey God's laws was to dishonor that relationship.

A member of our extended family does not like certain words. The words are not crude or curse words; they are normal words that people use almost every day. Still, this family member does not like them; for some reason they grate on her. I am aware that she does not like those words because she has told me so. Hence, if I use those words around her I am not doing anything morally wrong but I am sinning, if you will, against our relationship. I am not even breaking a rule of etiquette, but I am doing something I know she doesn't like. So I try not to use those words because I love her—not because the words are intrinsically sinful but because I love her and she does not like them.

Our relationship with God is both like and unlike our relationships with people. God is a Person, but God is also God. When He says that He does not like some word, deed, or thought, obeying Him is not merely a matter of being nice to Him, it's a matter of obligation because He is God. Not all the rules in the Old Testament have to do with intrinsic morality. For example, God told His people not to eat certain kinds of food. Those foods were not intrinsically immoral. However, God said not to eat them, so eating them was a violation of a relationship with Him. When God's people were obedient they did not eat that food, and they didn't go near the tabernacle when He said they were in a condition of uncleanness. We obey God's law because we have a relationship with Him and we love Him. His laws are stipulations of His covenant.

## God Provides Propitiation for Our Sin

*Propitiation* means to satisfy God's righteous wrath against sin through sacrifice. In [Leviticus 12, verses 7 and 8](#) have the word *atonement*. Propitiation is the New Testament word for atonement. The word *atonement*, however, is broader in meaning than propitiation. Atonement refers to reconciliation, two estranged parties coming together, becoming "at one" with each other. Atonement refers to doing what is necessary for two parties to be reconciled. Atonement usually refers to covering sin, or taking away sin, so we can be reconciled to God. It also refers to taking away uncleanness. In [Leviticus 12](#) childbirth is not sin; it is uncleanness. Atonement in [Leviticus 12](#) refers to removal of uncleanness and return to the state of cleanness.

So why use the word *propitiation* in a section on [Leviticus 12](#), since propitiation refers to satisfying God's righteous wrath against sin? Childbirth certainly is not sin, but it is a reminder of sin and an enduring symbol of sin. After our parents Adam and Eve sinned, God announced His judgment on their sin. One of the consequences of Eve's sin was that her pain in childbirth would be great. God said to her, "I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children in anguish" ([Gen 3:16](#)). The pain and blood of childbirth were reminders of the reason for increased pain in childbirth, and that reason was original sin. The pain of childbirth reminds us of the presence of sin in the human race because of the original sins of Adam and Eve.

When a baby is born, family members visit the hospital immediately after the birth to celebrate the arrival of the baby. When they see the mom in her room, she is typically very tired but also very happy. She asks family members, "Have you seen the baby?"

“Yes, we just saw him in the nursery on our way here!”

Her second question is not always as easy to answer. “Isn’t he beautiful?”

Grandparents can probably answer honestly, “Yes, he’s so beautiful!” but we grandparents are delusional. The truth is that the baby is red, wrinkled, bald, and his head is shaped like a football. When our grandchildren were born and we heard, “Isn’t he beautiful?” I told my wife in private, “Not really.”

Despite all of our fawning and cooing over newborns, we know those newborns are sinners. We are born in sin. [Ephesians 2:3](#) says we are “by nature children under wrath.” We are born with a sin nature. King David recognized that. He wrote of his own birth in [Psalm 51:5](#), “I was guilty when I was born.” The moment we are born, we are sinners. We inherited a sin nature from Adam and Eve, and every single one of us chooses to sin. As Stan Norman has written,

Opinions that regard human beings as morally neutral are at best naïve and superficial or at worst defective and delusional; all such assessments are unbiblical. . . . Sinfulness is part of the warp and woof of our existence. Sin is a corrupting presence in each human being. We are infected and enslaved by sin. (“Human Sinfulness,” 475)

When a child is born, we know that child is a sinner, and because sin leads to death that child is born to die. Ironically, birth is a reminder of our death, and our death is because of sin. Sin leads to death. Thank God, He provides propitiation for our sin; He provides for the satisfaction of His righteous wrath against sin because He loves us! [First John 4:10](#) says, “Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Because God loves us He incarnated Himself in human flesh as Jesus the Messiah, He took our sin on Himself on the cross, and He died as the sacrifice for our sins. [First John 2:1](#) refers to “Jesus Christ the Righteous One,” and [verse 2](#) says, “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins.” Jesus satisfied the wrath of God toward our sin; He paid the debt we incurred through sin. Jesus accomplished that saving work when He died as our sin sacrifice on the cross, and His atonement for our sin is made effective when we put our faith in Jesus.

## God Offers Salvation to All

The atonement Jesus accomplished through His sacrificial death on the cross is available to all people. [First Timothy 2](#) says God “wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” and Jesus “gave Himself—a ransom for all” ([vv. 4,6](#)). The universal availability of atonement is foreshadowed in [Leviticus 12. Verse 8](#) says, “If she doesn’t have sufficient means for a sheep, she may take two turtledoves or two young pigeons.” God made provision for the needs of the poor. Financial condition never excludes someone from the atonement God provides. God offers it to every person free of charge.

Luke, the Gospel writer, recorded the experiences of one particular young woman who went through the experience of childbirth. She faithfully observed the ceremony of purification, and she and her husband were so poor that they could not afford a lamb for a sacrifice. Her name was Mary, her husband’s name was Joseph, and their son’s name was Jesus. [Luke 2:22-24](#) says,

*When the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were finished, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord . . . and to offer a sacrifice (according to what is stated in the law of the Lord: a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons).*

The law Luke cited was God’s law in [Leviticus 12](#). How do we know that the atonement God offers in Christ is for everyone, even the poor? One way we know is that He was poor. His mom offered the sacrifice of a poor person. [Second Corinthians 8:9](#) says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich.” The atonement for sin and reconciliation to God He offers is for all; no one is excluded.

What do we do with laws like these concerning uncleanness and purification after childbirth? Do we ignore them? Do we include them in the by-laws of our churches? Do we crochet them, frame them, and hang them on our front doors? The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians that the law is a schoolmaster that leads us to Jesus. So we note the principles God teaches in each of these laws and we read the New Testament to learn how those principles are fulfilled in Jesus. [Leviticus 12](#) reminds us that God is the sovereign Ruler over life—every detail of life from the very beginning. [Leviticus 12](#) also reminds us that He intends for us to be separate from the sinful ways of this world. So much about our lives resembles death and the sinful ways that lead to death. We are unclean. We are sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. We are sinners. However, God provides the way for our sin and mortality to be removed. That way is Jesus, who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” ([John 14:6](#)). Jesus reconciles us to God. That’s what God says. And God rules.

## Reflect and Discuss

1. How is childbirth celebrated in God’s Word?
2. Why did uncleanness result from childbirth?
3. How does Scripture challenge the practice of abortion?
4. Why do you think the time of uncleanness and purification was longer if a woman gave birth to a girl rather than a boy? How could circumcision have affected this?
5. What does your obedience to God communicate to unbelievers?
6. Why do you obey God? Is it because you have a relationship with Him and love Him?
7. Define propitiation. How does God offer us propitiation?
8. Why is childbirth a reminder of sin and an enduring symbol of sin?
9. How is the universal availability of atonement foreshadowed in [Leviticus 12](#)?
10. [Second Timothy 3:16](#) says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable.” How is [Leviticus 12](#) profitable for you?

Unclean!.

### Leviticus 13–15

**Main Idea:** God is interested in every detail of our lives, including our illnesses. Illness exists because sin exists, but God takes away our sin through Jesus, and God gives us an eternal future in heaven where no sickness exists.

- I. **Sickness Exists Because Sin Exists.**
- II. **Sin Separates Us from God.**
- III. **God Cleanses What We Cannot.**
- IV. **Jesus Transforms Access to God's Presence.**
  - A. Jesus eliminates ceremonial law.
  - B. Jesus graduates us from symbol to substance.
  - C. Jesus incarnates God's presence.
- V. **Followers of Jesus Have a Future with No Sickness.**

In the last section we addressed eight verses. In this section we will consider the meaning and application of 149 verses. That is unusual, but because of the nature of the content of the chapters it is possible to do. [Chapters 13 and 14](#) address skin diseases, and [chapter 15](#) contains laws concerning bodily discharges. As we have done before, when we approach such laws that are obsolete in the age of the new covenant, we profess our belief in [2 Timothy 3:16](#)—"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable." In every chapter of Leviticus, including these, we also see the truth of Jesus' words in [Matthew 5:17](#)—"Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." Jesus does indeed fulfill the Law. Jesus also saves us from sin, heals us, cleanses us, and gives us eternal life in heaven. God gave laws like the ones we see in [Leviticus 13–15](#) to teach us how He related to His people Israel and how He wants to relate to us today.

We should note at the beginning that the purpose of these laws is not medical but ritual. God did not prescribe medical procedures to cure skin diseases. Instead, God decreed that certain kinds of sickness rendered His people ritually unclean. People who were unclean were not allowed to enter worship or to be with God's people. The people saw exclusion from worship and fellowship as a great hardship, so no one welcomed being sick or unclean. The goals of [Leviticus 13–15](#) are to teach the Israelites how to diagnose conditions that made them ritually unclean and how to return to a state of cleanness so they could return to worship and fellowship.

As for the specific disease addressed in [chapters 13 and 14](#), "skin disease" is the way the Holman Christian Standard Bible translates the Hebrew word. Other translations have "leprous disease" (ESV), "defiling skin disease" (NIV), or "leprosy" (NASB, KJV). The Hebrew word translated into those words was used to refer to a rather wide range of skin diseases—minor and major. "It did not refer to any particular skin disease, such as psoriasis, but covered a number of different diseases and conditions" (Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 274). Some of the procedures in [chapters 13 and 14](#) were designed to determine whether the disease was minor or major. [Leviticus 13](#) describes seven distinct situations with regard to skin disease. The first situation is a case of "a swelling, scab, or spot on the skin of his body" ([v. 2](#)). The affected person showed the condition to the priest. If it met the criteria for uncleanness, the priest declared it unclean. If its appearance was uncertain, the priest would quarantine the person for seven days, examine him again, and then quarantine him for another seven days. At the end of 14 days, if the spot had spread, the priest would declare the person unclean. If it had not spread, the person would wash his clothes and the priest would declare him clean.

The second situation was "when a skin disease develops on a person" ([v. 9](#)). The infected person would go to the priest, who would examine the skin. If the skin displayed the symptoms of

uncleanness, the priest would declare the person unclean. On the other hand, if white skin grew, the priest declared the person clean, since white skin indicated new, uninfected skin.

The third situation was “when a boil appears on the skin of one’s body” ([v. 18](#)). The person with the boil would show it to the priest, and the priest would either declare it unclean or quarantine the individual for seven days. At the end of seven days, if the boil was better the priest would declare the person clean. If it wasn’t better the priest would declare the person unclean. The fourth situation was a “burn on the skin” ([v. 24](#)). They dealt with burns the same way they dealt with boils.

The fifth situation was “when a man or woman has an infection on the head or chin” ([v. 29](#)). The affected person showed it to the priest, and if it met the criteria for uncleanness the priest declared the person unclean. If the affected area was uncertain, the priest would quarantine the person for seven days, examine it again, wait another seven days, examine again, and then declare the person clean or unclean. The sixth situation had to do with “white spots on the skin” ([v. 38](#)). The person with the spots showed them to the priest, and the priest simply declared the person clean or unclean.

The seventh skin condition had to do with loss of hair on the head. Baldness itself did not make anyone unclean. “He is bald, but he is clean” ([v. 40](#)). That comes as good news to all of us who are losing our hair. As a bald friend of mine says, “God made some heads perfect, and He put hair on all the others!” I live in a state that has a city with a perfect name for a retirement community exclusively for bald men. The city is named “Morehead City, NC.” The list of “bald jokes” is quite long, and it’s good to know that God declares baldness “clean.” However, if “a reddish-white infection” appeared ([v. 42](#)), a priest examined the infected area. If indeed a swollen area was reddish-white, the priest would pronounce the infected person unclean.

[Verses 45 and 46](#) state the consequences of being in a state of uncleanness. Unclean persons wore torn clothes, they let their hair grow out, they lived alone, and when they encountered someone they had to cry out, “Unclean, unclean!” Clearly, being in a state of ritual uncleanness was a difficult existence.

The final verses of [chapter 13](#) ([vv. 47-59](#)) have to do with garments that were suspected to be infected. Again, the owner of the clothes took them to the priest, and the process for inspecting clothing was even more extensive than the process for inspecting skin.

When someone recovered from a skin condition, the priest and the infected person observed a special ceremony before a priest pronounced him clean. The first part of [chapter 14](#) has to do with that ceremony of cleansing after a skin infection. After that ceremony the person being cleansed could go into the camp but not into his tent. He stayed outside his tent for seven days, and on the eighth day he brought sacrificial lambs and a grain offering to a priest. The priest offered sacrifices for the unclean person, after which he was declared clean.

The latter part of [chapter 14](#) has to do with houses infected with some sort of growth. That made little sense to people before we understood more about microorganisms, but now we know that a house can make us sick. In Israel, houses, much like people and clothing, could be declared

unclean and unfit for habitation. If a homeowner noticed spots, the law said to call the priest to inspect the house. Contemporary pastors who complain about all the vocational “hats” they have to wear should be grateful that the New Testament does not require them to inspect skin, clothes, or houses for infections or mildew. That would surely be an unwelcome addition to any pastoral job description! An old covenant priest, however, examined the spots in a house, and then he shut up the house for seven days. At the end of seven days the priest would order the infected stones removed and new stones placed in the house. If the spots re-appeared, the whole house would be torn down. If the spots did not re-appear, the priest said the house was clean and he observed a special ceremony that declared the house clean.

[Chapter 15](#) is what Ray Stedman called “the most feared chapter in Leviticus” (*The Way to Wholeness*, 90). I openly confess that I fear it. The reason can be summed up in two words—bodily functions. The media age in which we live has broken almost every taboo. In movies, on the Internet, and on television shows people seem to have no hesitation to talk about such things in detail. However, we regard our spiritual life, including public worship, as holy. We *should* regard our walk with God as holy, different; but if God did not intend us to read and talk about [Leviticus 15](#) He would not have put it in His law. [Psalm 19](#) says, “The instruction of the Lord is perfect,” and “The precepts of the Lord are right” ([vv. 7,8](#)). Therefore, nothing in any section of Scripture is indecent, though in Scripture God often addresses the indecency of human sin. What God says in His Word concerning bodily functions is candid but not vulgar. If the Bible offends us, it is not the Bible that is in error; our fleshly sensitivities are.

Our bodies are part of who we are, and God is interested in everything about us. As a young man I knew almost nothing about little girls. My sister was three-and-a-half years older than me, and our first two children were boys. I had never been around little girls, and as a male I did not really care about all the things little girls care about. I’m a guy, I’m different from them, I did not understand them, and I felt no need to understand them. Then our daughter was born. Suddenly I became highly interested in subjects I never knew anything about—leotards and lace, dolls and hair bows, dresses and everything in pink. I was fascinated with all those things, and overnight I began to love playing with dolls. The reason I became interested in those things is that they are part of my daughter’s life, and I love her. The same could be said about God’s relationship with us. One response to [Leviticus 15](#) should be to marvel at how many aspects of our lives God is interested in. In Leviticus God regulates food, clothing, work, neighbors, family, and health. People who think God is remote, disinterested, or disengaged should read Leviticus. This book has a different message about God. He knows and cares about every detail of every part of our lives. As Jesus put it, “Indeed, the hairs of your head are all counted” ([Luke 12:7](#)). God cares about the credit card bill we are having trouble paying, the difficult conversation we need to have with a friend or co-worker, the test we are facing this week, and even the little inconveniences of things like the weather and traffic. He cares about those things because they are part of our lives, and He loves us.

During the time in which God spoke the words recorded in Leviticus, the religions of other cultures portrayed their gods as detached from humanity, selfish, annoyed, and sometimes even antagonistic. In that theological environment, the one true God revealed Himself as all-powerful yet also personal, infinite but also in touch with the needs of the people He created. In [Leviticus 13–15](#) we also see some principles at work that are powerful and practical.

## Sickness Exists Because Sin Exists

God created a perfect world, with no sickness, no death, and no sin. God also gave a command to Adam and Eve, and He told them that when they disobeyed His command they would die. They disobeyed His command, so sin entered the world and so did death. However, it was not God's plan for Adam and Eve to die immediately. Spiritually they died immediately as their sin separated them from God. Physically their bodies deteriorated for years until they finally died. In fact, Adam lived to be 930 years old ([Gen 5:5](#)). Sin affected his body and he died, but sin's effects worked slowly. In the early years of the earth, long life spans were typical. From creation to the flood, life spans were in the range of 700 to 900 years. From Noah to Abraham, life spans were 200 to 600 years. During the age of the patriarchs, life spans were 100 to 200 years. After that, life spans were usually no more than 80 to 90 years and progressively grew shorter. Sin was proliferating and having profound effects on the human body. New diseases were introduced; the gene pool was corrupted. The deleterious effects of sin continued during the time when God gave these laws in Leviticus, and they continue with us today. Sin has had profound and undeniable physical effects on the human race. Sickness exists because sin exists.

In our comments on [Leviticus 12](#) we noted that blood in childbirth is a reminder of death. God said to keep death separate from the tabernacle because worship at the tabernacle had to do with life. We also noted that pain in childbirth is a reminder of original sin when God told Eve one of the consequences of her sin would be multiplied pain in childbirth. [Leviticus 13 and 14](#) highlight another consequence of sin—the deterioration of the body through disease. When Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, he called attention to the sinful way they were sharing the Lord's Supper. He wrote that when Christians participated in the supper "in an unworthy way," they were "guilty of sin." Further, Paul wrote that they were bringing God's judgment on themselves. Then he wrote, "This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep" ([1 Cor 11:27-30](#)). Paul seemed to be making the point that the Christians' sin led to their sickness and death. When someone is sick it is rarely possible to conclude the sickness is caused by a particular sin. Still, all sickness is caused either by our sin, by someone else's sin against us, or by the universal presence and effects of sin in the world. Sickness exists because sin exists.

## Sin Separates Us from God

According to God's law, skin diseases made people unclean, and when they were unclean they were not allowed to enter the area of the tabernacle. Sin separated them from the place of worship. That physical reality carried an important spiritual lesson—sin separates us from God. Of course, these chapters in Leviticus state people were declared unclean and excluded because of a skin disease, not because of sin. However, the skin disease was an external reminder of sin and the physical deterioration sin causes.

Why did God choose skin disease as a symbol or reminder of sin and the physical deterioration sin causes? There are *many* forms of sickness, *many* diseases. People were not excluded from worship because of a heart attack or a headache. Why did God choose skin disease and a few other disorders as the conditions that would cause His people to be ritually unclean? First, we should remember that these rules come from God, and since He is God, making the rules is His

divine prerogative. I do not discourage people from asking questions about the Bible, but as we do so we should be aware that God, since He is God, has the right to issue commands without explanation. We may be unable to understand the reason for every law because God did not supply us with a reason. Perhaps we do not understand the reason or the meaning of some laws because our understanding is finite and God, who gave the laws, is infinite. However, if for some reason we reject God's law or decide it is incorrect, we are at least being impertinent, if not blasphemous. God had a reason for all the laws He gave, even though those reasons may not be clear to us. So when we encounter things in the Bible that don't make sense to us, our impulse should be to give God the right to be God. Skin disease symbolized sin and separation from God because that is the symbol God chose.

It does seem, however, that skin disease, especially leprosy, is well-suited to communicate the message of uncleanness. Skin disease is external, visible. God wanted to remind His people of uncleanness and sin, and He chose something they could see so they would remember. Leprosy is progressive; its effects grow worse over time. Sin also is not stagnant. Sin seems insignificant at first, but it is insidious. The Devil and the world deceive us, and we deceive ourselves about how lethal sin is. Both leprosy and sin are progressive. Also, at the time God gave this law, leprosy was incurable. Sin is also an incurable disease as long as we are on this earth. Jesus saves us from sin, but we will never be completely without sin on this side of heaven. Some people are farther down the road of holiness than the rest of us, but none of us have reached the state of sinless perfection. [First John 1:8](#) says, "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Almost constantly we need to go to God for forgiveness and cleansing. Both leprosy and sin are incurable. Also, leprosy affects the nervous system so that infected people become progressively desensitized to pain. Most forms of sickness cause suffering by making us hurt; leprosy causes suffering by making its victims incapable of hurting. Sin affects us in the same way. The more we sin, the more we are desensitized to sin and its pain. The first time we do something wrong we feel guilt keenly. Sometimes we are even shocked. However, if we do it again, and again, we become progressively desensitized to the awfulness of sin until we lose the capacity to feel sin's pain. Both leprosy and sin have a desensitizing effect.

Leprosy was a reminder of sin and its effects on our bodies. God's law that skin disease made people unclean and they were to be separated from worship was a good reminder that sin separates us from God. [Isaiah 59:2](#) says, "Your iniquities have built barriers between you and your God." What does it take to come into the presence of the holy God? [Psalm 24](#) asks and answers that question: "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not set his mind on what is false" ([v. 3](#)). Skin disease made people unclean, and we have to have clean hands to come into the presence of God. Numerous commentators have pointed out that the skin disease described in [Leviticus 13 and 14](#) is an especially apt representation for sin. As Wiersbe has written, like leprosy, "sin is deeper than the skin . . . sin spreads . . . sin defiles . . . sin isolates . . . sin is fit only for the fire" (*Be Holy*, [56–60](#)).

## God Cleanses What We Cannot

In the laws concerning skin disease God gave the priests no ritual for healing the disease. Healing was in God's hands. People with a skin disease would get well or get worse, and that

was according to the sovereign providence of God. The laws God gave describe what to do if people got well, to re-introduce them into the community and into worship. So these laws are not about physical healing; they're about ritual cleansing, being prepared to be in the presence of God. God gave a process for His people to follow to move from a state of uncleanness to a state of cleanness. If they followed the process God gave, they could be confident that they were no longer unclean.

The process was gradual; it involved multiple steps. The people saw that being re-introduced into the presence of God in the sanctuary was not automatic or thoughtless. We too have a process to follow when sin has made us unfit to be in God's presence. It involves confession, repentance, and seeking God's presence in prayer and worship. All our spiritual progress is gradual. When we put our faith in Jesus, immediately we move from spiritual death to spiritual life, but our sinful flesh is still present. Christians can and do sin, so we still need help in dealing with our sin problem. God gives that help in His forgiveness, His cleansing, and His sanctifying power in us.

What sin did you commit last week? What sin do you struggle with regularly? Think about the sin in your life as you read [1 John 1:9](#): "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. How do we access God's forgiveness and cleansing? God gives it in answer to our prayer of confession. Part of our process of cleansing is the prayer of confession.

What prevents us from being healed? We cannot be healed as long as we defend our sin or make excuses *instead* of confessing. We say, "I can't stop myself from sinning. That's just the way I am. That's the way my family was, and that's the way my friends are." We use excuses like that instead of humbling ourselves and confessing. Our pride resists confession, but if we don't confess we miss God's cleansing.

Confession is necessary for cleansing, and so is allowing God to speak to us and change us through His Word. In [John 17:17](#) Jesus prayed to God the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth." God uses His Word to sanctify us, to make us holy, and He uses our prayer of confession to cleanse us. [Leviticus 13 and 14](#) say that God's process for moving His people from uncleanness to cleanness also involved a priest in every step. God uses His people to help us in the process of cleansing from sin, just like He uses His Word and our confession. God uses other means to move us from a state of uncleanness to a state of cleanness, and He uses it all by the power of His Holy Spirit in us. It is a process; we are never finished growing in holiness. Thank God that He enables the process of sanctification by cleansing what we cannot! If some sin is in your life, why not ask God to cleanse you right now? Will you finish reading this section clean before God or unclean because of unconfessed sin? God cleanses what we cannot.

## **Jesus Transforms Access to God's Presence**

God gave His laws concerning cleanness and uncleanness in the context of His covenant with His people. God has now established the new covenant in Jesus. God's old covenant prepared for Jesus' coming and taught us principles that help us understand the person and work of Jesus. God always knew that when the Messiah came and He initiated the new covenant, the old

covenant would become obsolete. The New Testament describes the new covenant in Jesus and confirms the obsolescence of the old covenant. Consider three ways Jesus transforms access to God's presence.

#### Jesus Eliminates Ceremonial Law

The process described in [Leviticus 13–15](#) is now obsolete. So are all the laws related to old covenant ceremonies. Jesus made that clear when Jewish leaders confronted Him about non-compliance with ceremonial law. The Jewish leaders asked Jesus why His disciples didn't wash their hands properly. For the Jews, that wasn't a matter of hygiene; it was a matter of ritual cleanness, or ceremonial law. Jesus responded by saying that the Jewish leaders were wrong to observe their ceremonial tradition while they disobeyed the *moral* law of the old covenant ([Matt 15:1-9](#)). On another occasion, some Jewish leaders accused Jesus' disciples of breaking ceremonial law by picking some grain and eating it on the Sabbath. Again, Jesus responded by treating ceremonial law as obsolete and stating that He is the Lord of the Sabbath ([Mark 2:23-28](#)).

Jesus also encountered lepers. Instead of pronouncing them ceremonially unclean and following the Levitical process, Jesus *healed* lepers. One time a woman with a flow of blood touched Jesus' robe. According to ceremonial law, He should have been made unclean by being touched by an unclean person. Instead, Jesus made ceremonial law obsolete as His power flowed to her and she was healed. Jesus eliminates ceremonial law.

#### Jesus Graduates Us from Symbol to Substance

[Colossians 2:16-17](#) refers to old covenant ceremonial law as “a shadow of what was to come,” and it says, “the substance is the Messiah.” The old covenant ceremonial laws were the shadow, and Jesus is the substance. God uses laws like those in [Leviticus 13–15](#) to teach that there is a difference between uncleanness and cleanness, and He wants His people to be clean. There is a difference between sin and holiness, and He wants His people to be holy. When Jesus came as God in the flesh, He introduced the new covenant in which He did away with the shadow and proved He is the substance. He taught that external things do not make us clean or unclean, sinful or holy, anymore. Instead, what is in our hearts makes us sinful or holy, and only He can change our hearts. The old covenant law shows us our dirtiness in God's sight, and Jesus came to be the way we become clean—not just clean on the outside, but clean on the inside, and clean forever. He graduates us from symbol to substance.

Paul wrote in [Galatians 3:24](#) that the law is our “tutor” (NASB) or “guardian” (HCSB) to lead us to Christ. In his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther cited the proverb that hunger is the best cook. Then Luther wrote that the law makes us hungry, and Jesus satisfies our hunger. Luther also wrote that dry ground longs for rain.

So the law makes troubled and afflicted souls thirst after Christ. To such people, Christ tastes wonderful; to them, he is nothing but joy, consolation, and life. And then Christ and his benefits begin to be recognized. Christ requires thirsty souls, whom he lovingly calls; he delights to water

such dry ground. . . . He comforts those who are bruised and afflicted by the law. (*Galatians*, 178)

Jesus Incarnates God's Presence

In these chapters in Leviticus the tabernacle symbolized the presence of God. The Bible teaches us that God is everywhere all the time because He is God, but God especially associated His presence with the tabernacle. God said that He would meet with His people at the tabernacle ([Exod 29:42-43](#)). The laws concerning uncleanness and cleanness taught the people of Israel to come in a state of cleanness into His presence at the tabernacle. [John 1:14](#) says Jesus “became flesh and took up residence among us,” and the word translated “took up residence” means to pitch a tent. Some scholars have suggested that “he tabernacled among us” is an apt translation (Michaelis, “*skēnoō*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:385–86). The tabernacle was a big tent where people went to meet with God, but now God Himself has come in the flesh in Jesus. God has pitched His tent among us in Jesus, and if we want to know God and meet with God, we go to Jesus. He incarnates God's presence.

## Followers of Jesus Have a Future with No Sickness

[Leviticus 13–15](#) is about physical infirmities, but the Bible says that one day followers of Jesus will no longer suffer from physical infirmities. Our earthly bodies are deteriorating. When we're children and teenagers our bodies grow bigger and stronger until we're fully grown. But not long after our bodies are mature, the aging process begins. The aging process is, like leprosy, a process of gradual deterioration. When we age we face all sorts of physical challenges as our bodies grow weaker. As a friend said, “Old age is not for sissies.”

That sounds pretty glum, but it's true. Paul wrote, “Our outer person is being destroyed” ([2 Cor 4:16](#)). However, he also wrote about our future. In [1 Corinthians 15](#) Paul wrote, “We will all be changed. For this corruptible must be clothed with incorruptibility, and this mortal must be clothed with immortality” ([vv. 52-53](#)). In eternity, when we have immortal bodies, what will life be like? [Revelation 21](#) gives a glimpse of what heaven is like.

*God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will no longer exist; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away. ([vv. 3-4](#))*

Skin disease will pass away. Uncleanness will pass away. Death will pass away. Sin will pass away. Life without infirmity is in store for every person who knows Jesus as Savior—no more pain, no more crying, no more death or mourning. God will wipe away every tear. How do we get to that life in heaven? Jesus said He is the way to heaven. Do you have a hurt in your life right now? Maybe you have been shedding tears or struggling with sickness or pain. God has in store for you an eternity without pain. Our bodies will be eternally well, and our hearts will be unspeakably joyful. In the meantime, God teaches us in passages like [Leviticus 13–15](#) to keep ourselves clean and holy until we are in His holy and loving presence forever.

## Reflect and Discuss

1. What are the goals of [Leviticus 13–15](#)?
2. How does Leviticus deny the false idea that God is remote, disinterested, or disengaged?
3. Why does sickness exist?
4. Why is skin disease, especially leprosy, well-suited to communicate the message of uncleanness because of sin?
5. What should we do when sin has made us unfit to be in God's presence?
6. With what sins are you struggling? Think about the sin in your life as you read [1 John 1:9](#): "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
7. How did Jesus make it clear that the ceremonial law is obsolete?
8. How does reading the law make you thirst for Christ?
9. What will heaven be like according to [Revelation 21](#)?
10. As we wait and long for eternity, what does God's Word teach us to do in the meantime?

Christ-Centered Exposition - Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Leviticus.

## Dining with God

### [Leviticus 11:1-47](#)

EVERY CULTURE HAS ITS OWN FOOD TABOOS. Dogs are not eaten in the West because they are considered "friends"; in China, however, they are accepted without hesitation. Next time you "down" a juicy hamburger, remember that you are eating an animal (cow) considered sacred among Hindus. The nations of the ancient world practiced food taboos related to their worship, too. Pigs, for instance, were widely rejected as a fit offering for the deities, except for the gods of evil and the underworld. Differences in Christian subcultures also occur, reaching back as early as the first inroads of Christianity into Gentile areas where they did not observe Jewish traditions ([Acts 15](#)). In the "Bible Belt" where I grew up, alcohol (even a drop of rum for cooking purposes) and cigarette smoking (it was possible to chew on a pipe but not to smoke it) were strictly prohibited. The clash of cultures may be illustrated by this humorous tale. A missionary couple newly arrived from the States paid their first visit to the home of one of their European parishioners. When they arrived at the door for the greeting, the German hostess dropped her wine glass when she saw that the pastor's wife had makeup on her

face! Although health concerns sometimes lead to naming certain "vices," the main criterion is tied to the abuse of the body, "a temple of the Holy Spirit" ([1 Corinthians 6:19](#)). As the Apostle Paul explained, "You are not your own."

God gave ancient Israel a designated list of foods that were permissible for food consumption. The text says specifically why: "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" ([v. 44a](#)). This was the assignment God gave Israel at Mount Sinai; they were to be "a holy nation" ([Exodus 19:6](#); cf. [1 Peter 2:9](#)). We will discover that the food laws achieved two purposes for Israel. First, the dietary laws were tied to creation, indicating that the taking of created life was the Creator's province and prerogative. Second, the food laws distinguished Israel from the neighboring nations and made Israel uniquely the Lord's possession. By resisting the foods of the nations, the Israelites had a built-in safeguard against assimilation and taking up the religious life of pagan cultures. That there was religious consideration given to proper food for worship and consumption can be seen even before the Mosaic legislation. God instructed Noah to house in the ark "clean" and "unclean" specimens, and upon disembarking he presented the clean to the Lord in worship ([Genesis 7:2, 8; 8:20](#)). Evidently there was an intuitive awareness of what was appropriate for an offering presented to the Lord. Also, one of the universals in human society is a shared meal among its members that heightens a sense of community. The church followed the Old Testament pattern of a fellowship meal. They partook of the Lord's Supper together ([Acts 2:42; Galatians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34; Jude 12](#)).

What was meant by "unclean" was not the superficial dirt that an animal might bear but a ritual category that had an underlying spiritual message. Commentator Roy Gane tells of a new Christian, a farmer, whose church observed the food laws found in our Leviticus passage. After the farmer had his baptismal service, he hosted the congregation with a meal that included pork! When the pastor asked him if he had learned about "clean" and "unclean" meats, the farmer answered, "Yes, sir... so I scrubbed my hogs real good before I slaughtered 'em!" This farmer did not yet understand that the pig was inherently ritually "unclean" and could not be moved to the "clean" category on the basis of a scrubbing.

An important factor we often overlook is the teaching on holy living that governed Israel's every behavior. There was no such thing as a secular versus a religious life in the Law. All was sacred under God's dominion. Paul expressed the same governing principle to his Corinthian readers: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). There is no more common and important feature than family and community meals. By virtue of the holy Tent of Meeting in the midst of Israel's tribal encampment, the people were obligated to be consecrated to God in their daily activities. Thus, the human condition and community practices were deemed either fitting for God (that is "clean") or unfitting (that is "unclean"). Since the people participated in sacred meals, such as the peace offering in their homes, there was recognition that the holiness of the sanctuary was extended to the homes of the people. They and their homes must be ritually clean, and that included their diets.

In order to answer the chief question of what the food laws were designed to do, we must review the chapter to establish the context's structure and basic contents.

### *Holy Nourishment (11:1-23, 41-45)*

That the Lord spoke to *both* Moses and Aaron reflected the important assignment that Aaron and his sons played in applying and instructing the Israelites in the purity laws in chapters 11-15 ([10:10, 11](#); [13:1](#); [14:33](#); [15:1](#)). Two listings of creatures occur in our passage ([vv. 2b-23, 41-43](#)). The precise identity of several Hebrew terms for the animals listed is uncertain. For this reason the modern English versions show variations in some cases. The categories of the creatures are arranged according to their natural habitat: the land ([vv. 2b-8](#)), sea ([vv. 9-12](#)), sky ([vv. 13-23](#)), and the ground ([vv. 41-43](#)). Two negative terms are used to describe the cultic status of the creatures. The more frequent word is "unclean" ([vv. 1-8, 24-40](#)). This term describes those creatures that were not only illicit but also polluted through consumption and physical contact. The second is the harsher term "detestable" ([vv. 9-23, 41-43](#)); the people who eat these creatures made themselves "defile[d]" ([v. 43](#)) in the eyes of God. They include most sea and sky creatures and all reptiles. Sandwiched between the two lists are instructions regarding the touching of dead carcasses ([vv. 24-40](#)). The summary conclusion in [verses 46, 47](#) provides the purpose of the food laws, which as we have said is grounded in the holy character and demands of God.

*Land animals* ([vv. 2b-8](#)). The land beasts receive more attention than other categories, although meat was not a common feature of the average Israelite household. Land animals were created on the same day as the first humans, the sixth day ([Genesis 1:24, 25](#)). The criteria for determining the proper four-footed animal was twofold: completely split hooves *and* chewing the cud (bringing food up from the stomach to be chewed again). The word "and" is significant in [verse 3](#) because the creature must possess both features. These included domesticated livestock—the cattle, sheep, and goats that dominated daily ritual sacrifice and feasts and were the most important of the creatures. Animals that possessed one *or* the other, as we find in [verse 4](#), did not qualify. Special mention is made of four animals commonly known to the Israelites that were prohibited because they possessed only one of the features—the camel, rock badger, hare (or rabbit), and pig. Ritual contagion from the carcasses of the unlawful animals could occur by touch also and therefore were to be avoided when possible.

*Sea creatures* ([vv. 9-12](#)). The creatures of the seas and rivers were created on the fifth day. Fish was not a common staple for the ancient Israelite's diet. Fish was typically imported ([Nehemiah 13:16](#); cf. [2 Chronicles 33:14](#)), although some species may have been fished in the fresh waters of the Sea of Galilee. Ezekiel's prophecy portrays an idyllic future in Palestine when fish of all varieties will be abundant ([47:9, 10](#)). At a later time, as in New Testament times, the fishing industry became more important to Palestine. As in the previous category, all fish with two features could be eaten—"fins and scales" ([v. 9](#)). Creatures that lacked one or the other had to be viewed as imperfect. Any incomplete creature would not be appropriate for the perfections of the Lord and his people. Moreover, sea creatures that crawled rather than swam appeared out of place as inhabitants of the sea and thus were inappropriate for consumption. A new element in this description is the repeated terms "detestable" and "detest," occurring in total four times in three verses. The usage of this word group usually identifies unfit creatures in food laws but occurs one time (verbal form) designating a religious idol that must be "utterly detest[ed]" ([Deuteronomy 7:26](#)). This shows the severity of transgressing this food law.

*Sky creatures* ([vv. 13-23](#)). Birds and flying insects are suitable for the air. The birds were created on the same day as the sea creatures. Both birds and fish bore the blessing of God, so that they were numerous and prolific ([Genesis 1:22](#)). Birds could be caught for food by snares and nets ([Proverbs 1:17](#); [Amos 3:5](#)). No criteria are given for discriminating among the birds; rather, a list of forbidden birds follows. These forbidden birds also received the unfavorable designation "detest[able]" ([v. 13](#)). Many of these birds are carnivorous (e.g., hawk, falcon, vulture), feeding on meat killed by hunting or feeding on dead flesh, carrion. Flying insects are treated under the same category of the sky habitat because of their flight or hopping. The kind of mobility that the insect had was probably a factor in determining the approved insects for consumption (see [v. 42](#)). Those bound to the ground on all fours were unsuitable, but those with jointed legs that enabled them to jump, such as locusts, were edible (see John the Baptist's diet, [Matthew 3:4](#)).

*Ground creatures* ([vv. 41-45](#)). The second sustained list names creatures limited to the ground. These are creatures that were the least favorable because of their mode of locomotion and their lowly position in deference to humans, who stand erect. They have unbroken contact with the ground: "swarming things that swarm on the ground" ([vv. 29, 41, 42](#)). None of these varmints were accepted for consumption. Snakes, rodents, and creeping things were among these. Eight specific types are mentioned in [verses 29, 30](#) in the context of instruction pertaining to dead carcasses. These were also "detestable" but had the added feature of a person making *himself* equally "detestable" through contact with them ([v. 43](#)). The words "make... detestable" and "defile" mean "to make one ritually unclean." This level of defilement was to be especially feared. This is probably why only here in the chapter do we have the exhortation to holiness: "consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy" ([v. 44](#)). Rather than making themselves defiled, the Israelites had to labor to be holy ritually through the careful observance of the purity laws.

The food laws were based on the theology of God's holy character. It was not merely a cultural manifestation of the Israelites but an important relational concept within the unique covenant commitment that God had formed with the nation of Israel at Sinai. That the Lord "brought [them] up out of the land of Egypt to be [their] God" ([v. 45](#)) recalled that the people were redeemed and exclusively belonged to him. The Israelites demonstrated their gratefulness and obedience to the Lord through maintaining the purity laws and purification rites. The Apostle Paul expressed a similar sentiment when imploring his Christian readers to live a life worthy of their salvation and namesake, our Lord Jesus Christ ([Ephesians 4:1](#); [Philippians 1:27](#); [Colossians 1:10](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:12](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:5](#)).

*Why these foods?* Scholars have offered various explanations for why particular creatures were prohibited. The hygienic value of the Hebrews' diet has long been recognized, but this is secondary; some of the prohibited creatures are not unhealthy for human consumption, such as camel and rabbit meat. We must look for another reason. Since the creation account in Genesis reflects distinctions in the animal world and the first created humans distinguished foods in their diets ([Genesis 1:26](#); [9:3](#)), the Hebrew food laws probably echoed the earliest recognition that there was an ordained pattern in creation to be followed. God is a God of order, and creation reflects harmony and symmetry. If the creature in question did not conform to the criteria given by the Creator, the food was disapproved. The food laws taught the Israelites that they too must conform to the holy standards of their Creator and Redeemer. By their very dietary and domestic habits, the Israelites differentiated themselves from the surrounding nations.

In times of exile, for example, the Jews rekindled their distinctive heritage such as observing the dietary laws. Daniel and his friends resisted the foods of Nebuchadnezzar's court and remained true to their Hebrew faith ([Daniel 1:8](#)). The Jewish religious leaders became so adamant about adhering to their food practices that those practices became a badge of Jewish identity during the post-exilic era and into Christian times ([Colossians 2:16](#)). Observant Jews to this day eat only kosher foods, that is, foods and their preparation that are fit for eating in accordance with Jewish law. The term *kosher* comes from rabbinic literature, not from the Bible. Elaborate Jewish laws after the first century in rabbinic literature expanded the Biblical laws, such as prohibiting the eating of dairy products with meat. This prohibition is not clearly specified in the Biblical food laws.

*Christian application.* What can we learn from these ancient food laws that will help us in our Christian living? We see firsthand the remarkable liberation that Christ has provided for us. The Law's demands have been wonderfully fulfilled in Christ's obedience so that righteousness might be realized. When we come to Christ as Savior, we are the beneficiaries of his perfect obedience and his full acceptance by God the Father. The early Christians recognized that with the coming of Christ, the food laws that once separated the Hebrews and the nations were no longer binding in the same way ([Acts 10:11-16](#); [Colossians 2:16](#)). They did observe them, however, when they sought to be a better witness or to promote unity in the body of Christ ([Acts 15:1-20](#); [1 Corinthians 9:19, 20](#)). In a basic way as Christians we still observe the purpose of the purity laws when we take up their underlying principles that remain true in every generation. The Israelites observed the food laws because they were obedient to God's Word by which they brought honor and glory to the Lord, their Redeemer. The same principle directs Christian living; all that we do must be for the glory of God ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). Christian living that is consecrated to the Lord is derived from the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer; it is not external but from the inner person. Jesus said to his critics, "Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean)" ([Mark 7:18, 19](#); see [Romans 14:17, 18](#)). Observance of food taboos does not in itself bring us closer to the Lord. "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do" ([1 Corinthians 8:8](#)).

Yet Christians must use wisdom and exercise spiritual maturity in choosing food and drink ([Romans 14](#); [1 Corinthians 8](#); [10:23](#)) and in their associations with non-Christians ([1 Corinthians 5:11](#); [2 Corinthians 6:14](#)). One friend in my seminary days was steadfastly opposed to any drinking of an alcoholic beverage by a Christian. She was the daughter of an alcoholic and saw the destruction of her father's life and the sorrow that her family had endured. For a Christian to treat alcohol cavalierly in her presence would be an injurious gesture against this sister in the Lord. Moreover, the pain associated with drunkenness in our culture, such as drunk driving and physical abuse, would militate against Christian endorsement in the eyes of some non-Christians today. Of course, one could complain that obesity or gluttony is also a growing health problem in the United States, especially among children. There may be medical reasons for this condition, but most suffer from it due to the cultural trend of overindulgence in all areas of life. Addictive behaviors speak to the world of undisciplined lives that we need to address as Christians and give special assistance to in our churches. Our Lord urged his disciples to live a sober and watchful life: "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness

and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap" ([Luke 21:34](#); see [Proverbs 23:2](#)).

*Holy Living (vv. 24-40)*

There is one more important aspect to the treatment of creatures that makes for holy living. Sandwiched between the listings of the food laws are the directions pertaining to the handling of dead bodies, human and animal. Since God was the God of the living who delivered his people, it was offensive to God that the dead were in his presence. Special steps were needed to remove the offense of a corpse from the sanctuary and from the camp. We remember that the Lord dramatically struck down Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, for unlawful practices in the sanctuary. The removal of their scorched bodies from the sanctuary required Aaron's Levite cousins. As priests who approached God in behalf of the people, Aaron and his two surviving sons could not attend to their dead bodies or even attend their funeral ([Leviticus 10:1-7](#)). Holy living meant ridding the camp of anything that pertained to death and disease, the natural imperfections of all creatures. The main point of Moses' instructions was for the people to avoid touching corpses when possible because dead bodies conveyed ritual contagion through contact. This made the person or thing unfit to remain in the camp. Only after the proper ritual cleansing was the person or item reintegrated into the life of the community. Coming into contact with a creature's remains would be inevitable, of course, but the Lord's gift provided a remedy for uncleanness that reunited the offender to the holy camp. The passage addresses three categories of the dead: the four-footed animals forbidden for consumption ([vv. 24-28](#)), the swarming creatures on the ground ([vv. 29-38](#)), and carcasses of the creatures approved for consumption ([vv. 39, 40](#)).

*Carcasses of forbidden creatures (vv. 24-28)*. These creatures were already said to be prohibited from consumption, but we learn here that their bodies were also corrupting. All corpses, human or animal, transmitted cultic corruption through touch ([Leviticus 22:4](#); [Numbers 5:2](#)), and for consecrated persons, such as priests, just coming into the presence of a dead body resulted in defilement ([Leviticus 21:11](#); [Numbers 6:6](#); [Haggai 2:13](#)). The transmission of uncleanness happened through one of two ways: the touching of a dead body or through the disposal of it ([vv. 24, 25](#)). The offender was isolated from the community; the duration of pollution lasted until evening ([Leviticus 22:6](#); [Joshua 8:29](#)). There was no automatic restoration to the camp at the close of the day. In parallel passages we learn that the offender had to wash his body before returning ([Leviticus 17:15, 16](#); [22:6](#)). A person who transported a cadaver, however, must undergo additional purging since the extent of the contact was longer and more substantial. It was assumed that the clothing of a person carrying off a carcass must have rubbed against the remains, and thus this defilement required laundering the garments as well as washing the person's body.

*The swarming creatures on the ground (vv. 29-38)*. The despised vermin that scampered across the ground or household floor deserved more elaborate precautions, especially since they were numerous and contact with them would be inevitable. These creatures, such as insects, conveyed contagion through two means: direct contact ([v. 31](#)) or indirectly through secondary contact ([vv. 33-38](#)). This latter category reminds us today of tobacco's secondary smoke that is a health risk for bystanders and children in the home.

The passage gives everyday scenarios of how this could happen and how to get rid of the uncleanness. Items made of common material, such as wood and cloth, had to be submerged in water until evening ([v. 32](#)). Also, generally speaking, any item made of material that absorbed liquid required an extreme response since the corruption could not be removed. A clay pot that was defiled by insects, for example, absorbed polluted water; it had to be smashed since the water could not be completely purged (also [Leviticus 6:28; 15:12](#)). Food or beverages touched by contaminated water was likewise unclean ([vv. 33, 34](#)). Cooking fixtures, such as a stove, had to be busted into pieces ([v. 35](#)). If, however, the carcass was in a spring or reservoir, the water was not unclean; it was a permanent body of water surrounded by the ground and was not portable ([v. 36](#)). Another exception was seed contacted by an insect. If the seed was dry, it remained clean; contact with seed already wet, however, made it unfit. This was because the seed would absorb the contaminated water ([vv. 37, 38](#)).

*Carcasses of creatures permitted for eating* ([vv. 39, 40](#)). The sole category remaining was the dead body of approved animals. Dead creatures killed by wild animals or by natural means and not slaughtered for food could be eaten, but they still conveyed uncleanness ([Leviticus 17:15](#); this was absolutely prohibited for a priest, [Leviticus 22:8](#)). The purification rite demanded more of the person who had longer contact with the corpse, involving the laundering of clothes for those who ate or transported the animal.

*Sanctifying the mortal body.* When Jesus was questioned about the resurrection, he responded, "Now [God] is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him" ([Luke 20:38](#)). Our God is "the living God" (Jeremiah

[10:10](#)), and his plan is to have a living people with whom he can live and love: "... 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'" ([2 Corinthians 6:16b](#); cf. [Leviticus 26:12](#)). Jesus was not deterred by death and the dead in bringing salvation to those who recognized him as the Son of the living God ([Matthew 16:16](#)). He was willing to touch the ceremonially unclean coffin that held the body of a widow's son and called him from death to life ([Luke 7:14](#)). And our Lord touched the corpse of Jairus' daughter:

And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat. ([Mark 5:39-43](#))

But the ultimate salvation of the mortal body is the resurrected and glorified body that God has in store for all who believe. "... this mortal body must put on immortality," the Apostle Paul said ([1 Corinthians 15:53](#)). All creation equally yearns for its release from death and decay and will join us in the future glory that awaits us at "the redemption of our bodies" ([Romans 8:23](#)). As the Lord provided a cleansing of those defiled by death and the dead in the days of Israel, the Lord

has now mercifully made possible through the blood and death of our Lord Jesus a permanent and sure purification.

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People.

## Born Into the Family of Faith

### [Leviticus 12:1-8](#)

IF YOU VISIT A NEW MOTHER IN THE HOSPITAL, your first stop is undoubtedly the hospital nursery to see the new baby. And the first question inevitably from the mother is, "Have you seen the baby?" She is so pleased to learn that you have. The second question put to you is not so easily answered: "Isn't she beautiful?" Of course, this is more of a statement than a genuine question. My home pastor knew how to face the dilemma of being truthful but also pastoral. Actually, the baby is red, bald, shriveled up, and screaming. But to the parents and grandparents, she is the most beautiful baby in the world! How should you respond? My pastor would say to the beaming mother, "That's a baby! That's a baby!"

There is nothing more joyful in our lives than the birth of children. They are given great value in the Bible. The psalmist reflects the viewpoint of the Scriptures toward birthing children: "Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.... Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!" ([127:3-5](#)). Jesus is always depicted in the Gospels as welcoming children and their parents (e.g., [Matthew 19:14](#)). We are terribly surprised to learn, however, that the Mosaic law also declares that new mothers are "unclean." New mothers experienced a period of social segregation and afterward were required to bring animal sacrifices to the Tent of the Lord for ceremonial cleansing. How does the Leviticus requirement of purification after childbirth square with the Bible's high view of children and motherhood? We will find that the ritual of cleansing testifies to the sacredness of life and the importance of birth and motherhood and conveys the spiritual message of birth into the family of the Lord. We will come away from this passage with a renewed devotion to God as the source of all life who through his Son Jesus Christ has redeemed fallen humanity.

Our passage divides into two parts: the *sanctity* of life is reflected in [verses 1-5](#), and the *sanctification* of life is reflected in [verses 6-8](#).

### *The Sanctity of Life (12:1-5)*

The message of the Christian faith always celebrates life, life of all kinds, both animal and human. Ours is a God who creates, protects, and provides for life. This important aspect of God's outlook toward life shows itself in many ways, one of which is the way Biblical law instructed the Israelites in matters pertaining to the human body. The connection between the body's power to reproduce life and the various bodily fluids make for a symbolic picture of the power of life and death. Blood is the most natural evidence of life and death. It is indicative of the life-force,

and consequently there was special reverence toward the treatment of blood, both of humans and animals. The blood belonged to God because he alone is Sovereign over life. Leviticus tells us that "the life of the flesh is in the blood" ([17:11a](#)). This theological rationale explains why the Mosaic law required a new mother to experience a purification ritual after childbirth. There had to be an accounting for the postnatal blood flow of the new mother in the ceremonial life of the people.

*Two clarifications.* Before we continue, however, we should pause to correct two potential misunderstandings of the law for new mothers. First, we must clarify what is meant in the text by a new mother being deemed "unclean" ([v. 2b](#)). The word "unclean" is not a term that refers to immorality; rather, it speaks of *ritual* impurity. A ritual is a symbolic act or series of acts designed to convey a message. When a mother gives birth to a child, there is a flow of blood that follows the baby's birth. This is a natural function of the birth cycle. At this critical moment in the life of the mother and child, in the life of the family, and in the life of the community, the passing of blood provided a powerful image of the significance of life and its opposite, the loss of life. The flow of blood conveyed to the parents that life and death are in view. The emission also sent the message that human life is imperfect. The Bible tells us that God is the only true perfect One. He is flawless in his personal attributes, such as his love, moral purity, and faithfulness. Therefore, anything or anyone that had a physical disorder could not be admitted into the house of worship. The thought that a woman giving birth could be viewed as a *disorder* is difficult for us to understand since giving birth was and is considered a divine blessing, a cherished experience valued by Hebrew society. But further reflection on what we mean by the word *disorder* helps us accept this idea. A disorder technically means what is not the normal, regular experience of life, a change whether for good or bad. The stages of conception, pregnancy, and birth require extensive changes in the body and are not the usual daily condition of a woman's body. This means a woman's pregnancy and childbirth reflect an unusual condition, not her typical healthy, whole state.

It is critical to our understanding that we remember that the key to interpreting symbolic ritual is *appearances*, namely, what the events convey, not the acts alone. It would be inappropriate for the symbol of death, in this case the mother's postnatal blood, to be present in the sanctuary where God resided. Only after the cessation of the natal fluids could the woman be accepted fully into the community of worship. The change in the physical condition of the woman appeared to express a disorder.

The second clarification is that Israelite women were not the *only* ones to have a *disorder*. Men, who had physical irregularities such as emissions or skin diseases (chapters 13-15), also were deemed ritually impure. Also, our passage does *not* teach that the newborn child was considered "unclean." There is no instruction given regarding the cleansing of the child. The ritual of circumcision was not a ritual of purification ([v. 3](#)); it was a ritual of covenant initiation that declared the child's acceptance into the community of Israel. If it were a purification rite, making the child pure, then females remained in a perpetual state of uncleanness since there was no comparable rite for the daughter. The children then were not considered inherently impure.

After setting aside these potential hindrances to our understanding of the passage, we turn to the message of the text.

*Separation for the mother.* As a consequence of her physical changes, a new mother spent a specified time in seclusion, which meant a cessation of normal domestic activities, although she was permitted to live at home. The seclusion within the home was seven days if the baby was a male child or fourteen days if a female. Seven days were the same length of time in the case of a woman's monthly cycle ([v. 2b](#); [15:19-24](#)). Presumably the two conditions were associated because they both involved the discharge of blood. After this time of domestic segregation, she could again take up her normal household duties. Childbirth, however, required longer ritual separation because the flow of the discharge continued. During this time the mother could not be in the sanctuary, nor could she touch anything holy, such as holy food especially dedicated to the Lord. Her state of ritual uncleanness restricted her from holy things, lest by contact she contaminate the holy by her impurity. The text calls this additional time "the blood of her purifying" ([v. 4](#)), meaning that she was in a process of becoming pure but was not yet fully pure.

The duration of the continued restriction was thirty-three days for a male child and sixty-six days for a female. Again, this was not a hygienic issue; rather it had a symbolic function. The point is that men and women are not naturally pure; only God is pure in all his moral perfections. Therefore, there had to be for symbolic reasons an interval of segregation until the woman's body returned to its normal state. The typical time period for the mother to complete her course of emissions was two to six weeks. That the time for a female child was twice that of a male child creates a difficulty for interpreters. The immediate thought by people in our culture today who read this may be reactionary. It can be taken simply that little boys are better than little girls. But this cannot be the case in the context of this passage since the child was not considered unclean. What may be at work here is the presence of two females; the mother and the daughter require twice as many days as the birth of a boy. If this is the case, then the assignment of the additional forty days for the daughter may be explained by the potential she has to be a child-bearer.

One feature of the purity laws in the Bible is the necessity of time as a step toward purification and reintegration into the community. Purification was always a timed process, not an instantaneous event. That the Israelite underwent an extended procedure for restoration communicated the gravity of the person's infirmity and the difficulty of access to the gathered community for worship. The people participated in the process and thereby matured in their perception of a world marred by sin. They also better understood that unaided by God's help the perfections required of them were unattainable. The principle of temporal necessity is similar to Christian experience, too. Sanctification for the believer is both positionally instantaneous and experientially progressive. The New Testament acknowledges that the perfections of Christ that we receive as believers through the Lord result in a relationship with God that cannot be rescinded or surrendered. [Hebrews 10:10](#) declares that "we [believers] have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Yet, this relationship provided by Christ must be lived out progressively. Christian maturation means a lifestyle of gradually deepening our spiritual fellowship with the Lord. This is not strange to us because we know that human behavior is shaped by two factors: genetics and our social behavior—the nature and the nurture of the child. Spiritual development also requires spiritual birth and spiritual fellowship. Christians, who are born into the kingdom, by yielding to the Holy Spirit resist the sinful impulses they must master: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor" ([1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4](#)).

*Circumcision for the child.* In the case of the birth of a male, the initial seven days of domestic seclusion was followed by the rite of circumcision. On the eighth day after birth, the mother took the child to the sanctuary where the foreskin was surgically removed ([v. 3](#)). Circumcision was also practiced by other people groups in the ancient world, such as the Egyptians ([Jeremiah 9:25, 26](#)). But the significance of circumcision in other cultures was typically a rite of male puberty, when a boy begins a transformation physically into a mature adult. Hebrew circumcision was commanded of Abraham and his descendants as the sign of the covenant that God had made with the patriarch and all his descendants ([Genesis 17:11-14, 23-27; 21:4](#)). This mark in the body indicated that the child was a member of the covenant community. A resident alien, for example, could only celebrate the Passover memorial if he and his household had chosen circumcision ([Exodus 12:48](#)). The Passover meal itself was a sign of the salvation that God had given his people in delivering them from the slavery of Egyptian bondage ([Exodus 12](#)). Both rites, circumcision and the annual Passover meal, declared that the participants were members of the community of Israel.

That the new mother could enter the Tent of Meeting on the day of her son's circumcision, despite her continued postnatal flow, shows that the custom of circumcision took priority ([vv. 3, 4](#)). The ceremony of circumcision, however, was always recognized in the Scriptures as only an external sign of identification with the people of God. It was intended to be an expression of the inner person's devotion to God and belief in the word of promise. [Leviticus 26:41](#) describes disobedient Israel as having "uncircumcised heart[s]." There were two levels of circumcision: physical circumcision and spiritual circumcision. These two are reflected in Jeremiah's condemnation of disobedient Judah: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab... for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" ([Jeremiah 9:25, 26](#)). In other words, the surrounding nations were circumcised physically but were not covenant believers, and the Jews whose circumcision was solely in the flesh were also not covenant believers and thus no better off than the godless nations who practiced circumcision. What God had always demanded of his people was spiritual commitment, a spiritual relationship with God symbolized by the rite of circumcision. Thus Moses could say, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" ([Deuteronomy 10:16](#)).

The New Testament writers interpreted circumcision in the same way, understanding that physical circumcision is valuable as a sign but is not sufficient for spiritual regeneration. There must be personal repentance and trust in the Word of God, whether one is circumcised or not ([Colossians 3:11](#)). The Apostle Paul observed, "But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God" ([Romans 2:29](#)). The parallel in the New Testament church to circumcision is the ordinance of water baptism, which provides an *outward* sign of the believer's identification with Christ and his church. Again we turn to the apostle who shows the parallel: "In [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" ([Colossians 2:11, 12](#)).

Some church traditions see water baptism as "the door of the church," meaning that it is the first ritual whereby the new member is admitted into the church of Christ. This is true to the extent that it is the first *public* act of the believer's affiliation with the gathered church of local believers. The New Testament, however, makes a distinction between water baptism and spiritual baptism, understanding that spiritual baptism is the spiritual regeneration of a believer who enters into relationship with Christ and the Universal Church, the Body of Christ ([Romans 6:4](#); [Ephesians 4:5](#); [Colossians 2:12](#)). Water baptism symbolizes the suffering and resurrection of Jesus and the identification of the baptismal candidate with the sufferings of Christ, the believer who has experienced new life in the Lord. Water baptism does not impart saving grace any more than circumcision for the Jew assured acceptance by God. Yet, it is also not less imperative than circumcision was for the faithful Jew. Water baptism is a Christian imperative and stands as the first formal evidence of one's new spiritual place in the family of faith (e.g., [Matthew 28:18-20](#); [Acts 10:47](#)).

#### *Sanctification of Life (12:6-8)*

*Purification provided (12:6, 7).* Although it was inevitable that men and women would experience times of separation from normal social relationships due to physical impurities, there was gracious provision offered by God for restoration. The procedure of purification included water on some occasions (e.g., [Leviticus 14:8](#)), but the prolonged cases of uncleanness required the application of blood to the sanctuary altar. Physical impurities meant that the altar had been polluted. Animal and bird sacrifices involved the spilling of blood, and it was by this ritual that the new mother could be accepted again at the sanctuary. The two offerings were a burnt offering and a sin offering. The burnt offering was a young lamb; this was usually an expression of gratitude and renewed dedication to the Lord. This would be a fitting offering as an expression of thanksgiving for the birth of the child. The sin offering was either a pigeon or turtledove; the blood of the bird was drained out at the side of the altar ([Leviticus 1:14, 15](#)). The sin offering, however, did not address some specific sin in the life of the mother. No sin had been committed by the mother. Rather, the sin offering was a *purification* offering, a shedding of blood whereby the ritual impurity that had compromised the purity of the altar in the sanctuary might be removed. The new mother's physical discharge of blood had brought impurity to the sanctuary and required purgation. This is what the text means by "atonement" ([v. 7](#)).

The Hebrew word for "atone" can have various meanings, depending on the context. In the case of sin, the word means to "expiate," that is, to make amends for sin. The outcome is that the Israelite was "forgiven" by God (e.g., [Leviticus 4:20](#)). For physical impurities, however, there was no sin involved ([Leviticus 12-15](#)); the blood in such cases wiped away ceremonial corruption. By carrying out the ritual, the mother had full acceptance once again in the sanctuary and had the freedom to touch holy things, such as food dedicated to the Lord (e.g., [Deuteronomy 26:14](#)).

*Provision for the poor (12:8).* Repeatedly the Mosaic law provides for the poor whose financial means cannot support the more costly animal offerings. The covenant with God included all of the people. A special provision is given for the mother who was poor. Two turtledoves or pigeons could be substituted. One bird was for the burnt offering and the other for the sin offering. These offerings were also said to achieve the same desired effect—atonement for the

mother and her purification. Purification was not based ultimately on the value of the gift but on the proper motivation of the giver.

### *Jesus and Our Purification*

The message of the passage for us today speaks to the purification that Jesus has provided.

*Ritual purification.* Our Leviticus passage is of special interest for Christians because of the birth story of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. The passage contributes to understanding the incarnation of Jesus, when the Son of God became a human being. The New Testament's account of Jesus' infancy tells of his presentation at the temple in Jerusalem by his parents where he underwent circumcision and where his mother Mary offered birds as her sacrificial gifts ([Luke 2:21-24](#)). That Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the temple shows that they diligently obeyed the law of their Jewish heritage. Three times in the Luke passage "the law of Moses" or "the Law of the Lord" is noted so as to emphasize the parents' adherence to God's Word. Jesus was reared in a household that honored the Word of God and observed the teaching of Scripture ([Luke 2:41-51](#)).

We also learn from this incident in the life of the infant Jesus that the family had a meager income since Mary's offerings were birds ([Luke 2:24](#)). The Scriptures as a whole do not dwell on Jesus' economic status. Jesus is not depicted as wealthy or destitute. Paul refers, however, to the Lord's spiritual poverty when he came into the world: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" ([2 Corinthians 8:9](#)).

Jesus who left the glory of Heaven at his incarnation exchanged it for the lowly conditions of humanity. So the exhortation by the Apostle Paul to his audience was to follow the example of the Lord by expressing their faith (i.e., their being spiritually "rich") through giving their material possessions to assist the poor.

*Spiritual purification.* The account of Jesus' circumcision in the temple as an infant brings us back to the point of the purification ritual in the Leviticus mandate we have explained. The birth ritual speaks of the sanctification of God's people, the purging of sin, and the gift of new life—a spiritual and communal life that enjoys fellowship with the Lord God. God has given life and has made a people for his very own. The purification ritual in Israel acknowledged the miracle of birth as God's gift but also the necessity of reconciliation, for God in his perfections cannot tolerate anything less among his people. The initiation of the child into the covenant people of God through the rite of circumcision fosters the hope of a spiritually living people who are obedient to the Word of God. The perfection of Christ and the atoning sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross removes the obstacles to fellowship with the heavenly Father that the sinful human condition has erected. As the Apostle John makes clear, "But if we walk in the light, as [Jesus] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son *cleanses* us from all sin" ([1 John 1:7](#)).

The incident of Jesus' circumcision and of the purification of Mary reflects what the Biblical writers teach regarding our Lord's mission. His circumcision was evidence of the humanity and humility of Jesus (cf. "but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the

likeness of men," [Philippians 2:7](#)). He was submissive to the Law of God, humbling himself by becoming a human being. Galatians says, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, *born of woman, born under the law*, to redeem those who were *under the law*, so that we might receive adoption as sons" ([4:4, 5](#)). Jesus' coming into the world was by human birth, by his mother Mary, a young Jewish girl who had exhibited a pious life of devotion to God. The expression "born of a woman" was used of any human person born ([Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4](#)). Jesus was not only fully human—he was a Jewish baby by ancestry. Yet, unlike all of us, Jesus was a human being without sin ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). What the Apostle Paul points out in Galatians is that Jesus, by virtue of being a Jew, was born "under the law" and therefore was subject to the demands of the Law. The Law in his case, however, was not a curse because he was not disobedient; he was not a slave to the Law as were all others who were subject to the Law of God. By his obedience and voluntary subjection to the Law, the Lord Jesus liberated those who were enslaved to the Law because of their sin. Jesus took upon himself at the cross the curse of the Law for us who have repented and believed.

A child born into the community of ancient Israel reminds us of the new birth, the spiritual birth, that the Spirit of God achieved for us through the death and resurrection of our Lord ([James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3](#)). We too can enter the family of God through faith in the Lord by whose blood we can receive redemption. By the work of the Spirit we are united forever with God. The child of God's family is born both of the flesh and of the Spirit ([John 3:5, 6](#)). We have been made "members of the household of God" ([Ephesians 2:19b](#)).

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People.

## Holy to the Core

### [Leviticus 13:1—15:33](#)

TREASURE HUNTERS IN THE FLORIDA KEYS reported discovering thousands of pearls buried beneath the ocean floor. Salvagers were combing through the wreckage of a Spanish galleon that had sunk in 1622. The rare and old pearls were contained in a small lead box. The first estimation was that the pearls were worth as much as a million dollars. This account of hidden treasure reminds me of Solomon's advice for obtaining wisdom: "[S]eek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures" ([Proverbs 2:4](#)). Our passage contains hidden treasure buried within the many ritual details described in the text. If we are industrious in our search, we can hear the Word of God and receive blessings from its teachings.

The overarching lesson is the importance of proper worship in the presence of God made possible through the gracious relationship God has with his people. Chapters 12-15, known as the purity laws in the book of Leviticus, recognize what we all know is true: we live in a world that is marred by death and decay in every aspect of life. Theologians speak of our world as a fallen world because sin committed by our first parents in the garden of Eden brought God's

judgment on humanity and on the physical world. The predicament we all face is summed up in this question: how can a people devoted to God live with God in a fallen world in which decay and death are the normal experience of human existence? It is inappropriate for men and women to enter into the presence of God when they exhibit the signs of decay and death. The purity laws acknowledge the challenge that humans face and provide a gracious answer that enables the people whose lives have been impacted by decay and death to be restored to the proper worship of God. Through their healing, God has made them whole again, alleviating them of the visual signs of decay and death. He has made the unfit fit again.

The purity laws also show us that the matter of the holiness of God is pervasive in the life of a believer. Holiness is considered by many people today as no more than good behavior, conforming to an established moral code in the context of religious practice. But the concept of holiness is fundamentally a description of a person's *relationship* with the only and truly Holy One, the Lord God. This relationship with God was the result of the redemption God provided for his people, liberating them from Egyptian slavery. Thus the teaching on the believer's holy living must begin with a right relationship with God. From this commitment to the Lord comes the desire to live in accordance with the redeemed life that God has given. This is the commandment of the Scriptures for Christians today: "[S]exual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" ([Ephesians 5:3](#)).

The message of the passage further tells us what God is like—a God of life and a God of perfections. It also tells us what all humanity is like. Our lives are marked by birth but also death, by wellness but also sickness. The disparity between the character of God and the limitations of human living meant the need for a bridge whereby the people could cross over into the holy presence of their saving God. God himself built that bridge through his gracious redemption and maintained that bridge through his law. He is a God who provides a means of relationship by atonement. He is a God of mercy and forgiveness. We will see as Christian readers how the provision of salvation for all men and women was secured through Jesus Christ, whose life and death ensured the relationship between God and the repentant person who trusts the Lord. Paul comments, "[Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" ([Titus 2:14](#)).

Our three chapters, although a very wide slice of Scripture, are taken together because they concern essentially the same issue. How can a people whose lives and possessions are marred by decay and death come into the presence of God for worship? Our passage presents evidence of human frailties by noting the routine features of human life. These defects show the imperfections and mortality of all humanity. The passage first describes the diseases of body and of house in chapters 13, 14. Second, it describes in chapter 15 the body's fluid discharges, primarily male semen and female blood.

#### [Disease \(13:1—14:32\)](#)

This passage describes human infirmities of two kinds: an individual's skin disorders and moldy defects in garments and houses. Clothing and houses are the trappings of daily human existence. That these two kinds of irregularities should disqualify a person from worshipping at the Tent of Meeting is surprising to us since in our world today these are relatively benign problems that can

be easily remedied. To understand the severity of the diseases, however, we must recognize the ceremonial significance of the conditions, not the hygienic aspect. The symptoms of skin decay and the discoloration of the garments and of stone walls were external signals of the inherent problem all of us face—the decay of human bodies and the decay of the things of this world.

As we look at the text, we see a discernible pattern in the arrangement of the topics that will be helpful. The subject matter intersperses descriptions of the skin disorders and the domestic disorders. Perhaps we can simplify by thinking of the two categories as dermatological disorders and domestic disorders. Chapter 13 gives the procedure for diagnosis, distinguishing routine inflammations from the chronic. Chapter 14 entails the course of action addressing the routine and chronic kinds of skin disorders.

*Dermatological* ([13:1-46](#)). The passage first concerns one of the most obvious signs of disease—skin disorders. Anyone who suffers from such diseases as eczema and psoriasis, symptoms of which include reddish blotches and scaly skin, will tell you how difficult it is to mask such problems. The first task of the priest was discerning the severity of the malady, whether it was a passing condition or one that was unending. Traditionally, ancient and modern translations have translated the Hebrew word in our passage (*tsaraath*) as the skin disease "leprosy." But the description of the illnesses in the Leviticus text does not correspond at every point to the symptoms of leprosy. Leprosy today is known as Hansen's disease, a disease that is due to a bacterium. If left untreated it results in facial and other physical deformities. Although the Hebrew term can refer to a severe skin disorder that does not heal, the word has a broad usage, referring in our passage to a wide range of skin pathologies. That the Hebrew word is not a technical term for one kind of disease, such as leprosy, is shown by its use in describing the patches of mildew in garments ([13:47-49](#)) and in the stones and timber of houses ([14:34, 35](#)). For this reason modern versions sometimes choose another expression to translate the word in our passage, such as "infectious skin disease" (NIV). The passage indicates, however, that there must have been some form of contagious skin disease that was a notorious and greatly feared ailment.

The priest decided whether the blemish was contagious or benign based on the *appearance* of the malady ([13:1-46](#)). There were two symptoms of the disease under consideration. The first was a discoloration of the hair at the spot of the blemish, and the second was a spot in the skin that was deeper than normal. If this were the case, the priest declared the person unfit for normal activities, and that person was quarantined for a period of two weeks. If after that time of observation the symptoms had not spread, the priest declared the malady only an "eruption." The person washed his clothes and returned to his normal life. If the spot had spread, however, the diseased area was declared acute, and the person was quarantined indefinitely until the symptoms disappeared. When a person suffered a chronic condition, the criterion for discerning healing was the growth of new skin. The affected skin, identified in the text as "raw flesh," had healed when new skin had grown over the blemish. Additional instructions dealt with diseased skin that developed secondarily as a complication to a prior condition. These prior pathologies included a boil on the skin, burned skin, scaly skin on the head and beard, white patches of skin, and discolored skin on a person's bald head or forehead.

But, we ask, what became of the person who continued to suffer the symptoms of the disease and was declared "unclean" indefinitely? [Verses 45, 46](#) describe the steps taken to segregate the

afflicted person from any social contact. The person wore torn clothes, untied his hair, and covered his mouth as he shouted out, "Unclean, unclean," warning others to beware his presence (v. 46). Wearing tattered clothes and leaving hair unkempt were symbolic acts of mourning. The diseased person lived "alone," remaining outside the camp. He could, however, join others of the same disease and was free to move about in the countryside ([Numbers 5:2](#); [2 Kings 7:3](#); [Luke 17:12](#)). The prospects for such a person were dim, and he faced the possibility that he would be banished forever (cf. Uzziah, [2 Kings 15:5](#)). He became dependent upon his family or the benevolence of others in the community to provide his material needs.

The severity of the isolation is by our standards today thought cruel, but this was not intended to be punitive. There was no *necessary* connection between sin committed by the affected person and his disease, although it was possible (cf. Miriam, [Numbers 12:10-15](#)). This is an important point to recall. The diseases described here are not the result of specific sins committed by the person. Rather, the diseases were part and parcel of the fallen world in which we live. It was and is a faulty conclusion to believe that every disease suffered by someone is the result of God's wrath against a sinner (cf. [John 9:3](#)). The stringent requirements of the Law protected the welfare of the community as a whole. The congregation was put in jeopardy since the disorder had implications for the survival of the camp. Apart from any medical considerations, the ritual implications were staggering enough. Neither imperfect animals nor blemished priests were permitted to approach the holy altar in the sanctuary ([Leviticus 21:17-23](#); [22:4](#)). Such a transgression ceremonially polluted the Tent of Meeting, nullifying the effects of the ritual offerings presented by worshippers. For a similar reason, an individual with a skin disease was prohibited from attending the sanctuary until the priest had declared the person ritually fit for acceptance at the Tent of Meeting. The key to understanding the message of the passage is that disease made a person unfit to enter into the presence of God who was the God of life and of holy perfections. Since the earthly Tent of Meeting was a copy of the spiritual heavenly sanctuary ([Hebrews 8:5](#); [9:1](#); [10:1](#)), it would be wrong to expose the symbols of death and decay in the place of worship. Although we live in a fallen world, the world for which Christians are destined, Heaven, will not have decay, disease, and death. Our place will be secure.

*Clothing* ([13:47-59](#)). The text turns next to abnormalities in the clothing of a person. Eruptions in fabric or leatherwork were suspect because they showed an outward appearance like the skin diseases. The same Hebrew term was used to describe the scaly patches in garments as was used for describing a person's scaly skin diseases. The correlation between the two was the appearance of the blemishes—both were scaly and rough in texture. Traditionally commentators identified the disorder in garments as a fungus growth, such as mildew. The blemish was viewed as a potential threat and required a priestly ruling as to the damage the abnormality might cause. The precise nature of the threat is not clear from the description in the text. The procedure for detection was similar to the skin diseases. The priest's goal was to differentiate between a non-contagious growth and an infectious one, which is termed here a "persistent" disease ([vv. 51, 52](#)). The priest relied on the extent that the spot spread and whether the color of the blotch faded. If the diseased spot was permanent, the garment had to be incinerated immediately; but if the spot was not contagious it could be laundered and returned for normal use.

*Purification ritual for skin disease* ([14:1-32](#)). Chapter 14 continues the discussion of dealing with skin and garment abnormalities. The rituals described in this chapter were purification rites

that provided ceremonial cleansing, restoring the affected person or item to ceremonial normalcy. It is important to observe that the ritual was not a therapeutic remedy for the disease. The ritual always followed *after* the diseased person or item had experienced "healing." The priest was not a doctor who prescribed a medical procedure. Any healing that occurred was the result of God's activity. The ritual only enabled the once unclean person or item to undergo a *ceremonial* reinstatement so the person could once again enter the sanctuary or the restored piece of clothing could be used again.

In the case of an affected person, the priest went outside the camp to examine the affliction. Once it was acknowledged that the disease had been healed, the priest initiated one of the most elaborate rites in the Law. We can summarize the procedure by noticing the progression of reintegrating the individual. There were three concentric circles: the infected person was outside the camp ([vv. 3-9](#)), the person was permitted inside the camp ([vv. 8, 9](#)), and finally he was permitted to enter the Tent of Meeting ([vv. 10-20](#)). The first ritual step occurred outside the camp and involved two birds, cedarwood, scarlet yarn, and a hyssop branch. The same procedure occurred for a person who became ritually unclean through touching a corpse ([Numbers 19](#)). Perhaps this was the way the person with skin disease was viewed. The shedding of the scaly skin suggested the wasting away of the body as in death. This would be reason for the person to be denied access to the sanctuary, since God as the God of life would not tolerate death or symbols of death in his presence. After this step, the diseased person could enter into the camp, but he could not reside in his home. There was an observation period of seven days. On the eighth day, the healed person entered the Tent of Meeting, presenting animal and grain offerings. In the case of a poor person, birds could be substituted for the costly animals ([vv. 21-32](#)). The result of the offerings was "atonement" ([vv. 18-21, 29, 31](#)), which meant the successful removal of the person's ceremonial uncleanness. The individual was then fully restored to his God and to his family and community.

*Purification ritual for houses* ([14:33-57](#)). The subject turns to the outbreak of the disease in affected houses. The best estimation by scholars is that the outbreak was the fungal growth of mildew. The priest employed the same measurement for determining the severity of skin disease—discoloration of the stone and the depth of the patch below the surface of the stone ([vv. 35-38](#)). As in the case of the skin disease, examinations at seven-day intervals revealed to what extent the affliction had spread in the walls of the house. In the most severe case, the whole structure was dismantled and carried outside the camp. The residents washed themselves and their clothing ([vv. 39-47](#)). The best outcome was the cessation of the outbreak, which would be repaired by replacing stones and plaster. After the repair of the structure, the priest performed the same elaborate ritual of the two birds called for in the case of a person healed of skin disease ([vv. 48-53](#)). The same result too occurred; the priest made "atonement" for the house ([v. 53](#)), meaning that the ritual uncleanness had been removed and the house had been restored to its full acceptance in the community. The ritual for the house differed from the case of a diseased person at one significant point—the absence of animal sacrifices at the sanctuary's altar. This was because a house did not have a covenant relationship with God. What was it about mildew that could be so important to the community? The scaly discoloration of the stonework indicated that the house was deteriorating, which meant the house was in decay. Because the people as members of a holy community lived in these dwellings, they could be ritually contaminated by the mildew, making them unfit to enter the Lord's sanctuary.

### *Discharges (15:1-33)*

As in the earlier descriptions, the text provides a detailed depiction of typical human excretions. That the people experienced bodily discharges was expected merely by virtue of their being human. The instructions in the passage occur according to gender, male discharges first, followed by the female ones.

*Male discharges (15:1-18)*. Male genital discharges were diagnosed according to whether they were chronic ([vv. 2-15](#)) or temporary discharges ([vv. 16-18](#)). The language translated "discharge" (*zab*) is the Hebrew word for "flow, issue." The diagnosis of the chronic condition is broad enough to include any persistent uncommon flow. The passage focuses on the contagious nature of the affected person. Any person's *direct* contact with the diseased person resulted in that person's own ritual contamination. Also, the contagion can be passed to another person *indirectly*, such as by the clean person touching the bed or chair of a contaminated person. Conversely, the contaminated person can transmit uncleanness through initiating contact, such as spitting on a clean person or riding on a saddle ([vv. 8, 9](#)). The Law instructed that contaminated persons or things be washed with water, and the infected persons remain unclean until the close of the day. When the man with the flow had experienced healing from his discharge, he waited one week and then on the eighth day presented himself to the priest at the Tent of Meeting. He made two bird offerings for his "atonement." The passage does not say that the persons who were contaminated through contact had to undergo the same ritual procedure. The implication of this omission may be that the contagion was not a medical disease but a ritual impurity. The persons and things infected secondarily could be cleansed through water ritual, whereas the man who had the flow had to wait until its cessation could be certified.

The instructions regarding the temporary condition pertained exclusively to the normal emission of semen. Sexual relations because of the passing of semen made the man and woman ceremonially unclean. Since normal semen flow was not as pernicious as the chronic condition, the ritual cleansing was bathing, and the state of uncleanness lasted only until evening. No animal sacrifice was required.

*Female discharges (15:19-30)*. The laws for female discharges address the discharge of blood. The nature of contamination and the procedure for restoration paralleled a man's obligations for temporary ([vv. 19-24](#)) and chronic discharges ([vv. 25-30](#)). The temporary discharge was the monthly period of a woman. During the week of her ritual impurity, anything that she touched was unclean, and secondarily those who came into contact with those same items became unclean. Persons who contracted the corruption had to bathe and wash their clothes, remaining unclean only until evening. For the chronic discharge of blood that exceeded a week, the same rules of contagion applied as long as the condition persisted. If her blood discharge ceased, she was considered healed. After a week of assessment and if the flow had not continued, the woman on the eighth day presented two birds as sacrifices at the Tent of Meeting. The parallel between the male and female conditions and their ritual purifications show that the woman's discharges were not viewed as any more unclean than that of the man.

### *Preserving Life (15:31)*

The challenge for the community was to remain ceremonially pure in order to continue under the protective benevolence of God. Impurity resulting from the various conditions described in the purity laws ([Leviticus 12-15](#)) put the members of the community in jeopardy, individually and collectively. These impure conditions contaminated the altar of sacrifice at the Tent of Meeting. Offerings presented at the altar were therefore unacceptable to God since they were presented on a contaminated altar. This pollution of God's dwelling-place meant that the people were subject to the penalty of death. This was a matter of life and death for the affected individuals but also for the whole community. The purpose of the laws was to maintain the people's "separation" (*nazar*) from the uncleanness that inevitably occurred as a regular part of human experience. The word "separate" also can mean "dedicate, consecrate" when used of persons or things separated *unto* God. In this case, the idea is that the people having once been unfit by ritual uncleanness were now separated *from* their ritual impurities. They were fit for worship again because God made them fit.

### *Christian Purity*

We are probably puzzled by what these purity laws can possibly mean for us as Christians. In our Christian lives we do not practice these laws for good reasons, the chief of which is that these laws have been realized in the complete and perfect obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are not directly applicable to us as Christians. Nevertheless, these laws too are the Word of God and are profitable for our Christian living when we recognize their correspondence to Christian teaching. What are their hidden pearls of teaching? Among the many pearls we will comment on just two, Christian compassion and Christian devotion.

*Christian compassion.* The Lord God showed compassion for his covenant people by providing a means through ceremonial cleansing to restore them to the house of God. We noted in our exposition of the Leviticus passage that the ceremonial rituals of cleansing only occurred *after* healing had happened. The washings and the sacrifices were not magical incantations or medicinal remedies. The people were dependent upon the healing that God alone could give them. That Jesus healed the infirm when on earth was a testimony to his deity as Lord. The evangelist Matthew recognized that the healing ministry of Jesus showed that the era of the kingdom had arrived: Jesus "took our illnesses and bore our diseases" ([8:17](#), quoting [Isaiah 53:4](#)).

Jesus exhibited his compassionate lordship over the Law and over disease when he healed lepers, even sympathetically touching one leper, which would have made Jesus ceremonially unclean ([Matthew 8:3](#)). But our Lord initiated the new era of the kingdom at his coming as his life completed and superseded the instruction of the Law. The commentator Derek Tidball highlighted the difference between the two covenants, the old and the new, when he summed up the old by the saying "Keep out! You are unfit" and the new message of Jesus as "Draw near! Let me make you clean!" Jesus also healed a ritually unclean woman who had suffered twelve years of continuous blood flow. The physician Luke noted that the woman had spent all her resources seeking a cure from physicians. She risked offending Jesus by touching the hem of his robe, but the Lord's mercy again fulfilled and superseded the Law. She received healing when touching the

Savior's garment because she did so as an expression of faith in the Lord as the Great Physician ([Luke 8:43-48](#)). The opposite result occurred from that expected in the Law: Jesus was not made unclean by her touch, and she was restored because she *did* touch.

The Bible repeatedly calls upon God's people to visit and minister to the sick. Mercy for the sick has always characterized the Christian message, as evidenced by the many Christian philanthropists, physicians, and nurses whose work has founded hospitals and clinics around the world. The ministry that many laypeople, typically working in anonymity, carry on for the ill and their families is an important witness to the love of the Lord—both his love for the sick and the helper's love for Christ. Such acts of mercy and healing declare that the Lord has come and has overcome the human dilemma that we all must admit.

*Christian devotion.* Our last observation brings us full circle, back to the title of this message, "Holy to the Core." The passage shows above all that the people in the covenant community had committed themselves to the Lord in all aspects of their lives. There was nothing in their daily life that the Word of God did not impact. The modern idea of two separate lives, a religious one and a secular one, was foreign to their outlook. Holy living began with a relationship with God, and from it came the lifestyle for which the Word of God called. In other words, relationship preceded and served as the seedbed for the fruit of holy living. *Relationship* comes before *regulation*. Today many people think that *holy living* is a synonym for morality. Holy living for them is practicing values that fit with the moral legislation of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, there is a correlation between authentic devotion to God and Christian virtues, for Peter quotes Leviticus when he exhorts his readers to holy conduct: "You shall be holy, for I [the Lord] am holy" ([1 Peter 1:15, 16](#)). But moral conduct is not necessarily connected with love for God and commitment to Christ. We all have come across people who were of another religious tradition or of no religious tradition at all whose lives were morally impeccable. They exhibited integrity, courage, and sacrifice and closely controlled their sensual desires. Sometimes such moral people show better behavior than Christians do! But holy living is at its most fundamental level the *relationship* we have with God ([Colossians 1:19-23](#)). This relationship with God is secured for us through Jesus Christ, by whose blood atonement we have been cleansed of our sins and reconciled to God. Christ's death for our sins and the gift of his righteousness has made us fit for the kingdom. The Scriptures tells us, "If we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" ([1 John 1:7](#)). Our loving devotion to the Lord spurs us on to live obediently. Jesus said as much: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" ([John 14:15](#)).

Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People.

[Leviticus 11:1-47](#)

### *Clean and Unclean: Food Rules*

Land Creatures [11:1-8](#)

Water Creatures [11:9-12](#)

Flying Creatures [11:13-23](#)

The Solution [11:24-47](#)

## **Setting Up the Section**

The third major section of Leviticus (chapters 11-15) defines what is clean and unclean. The label *clean* and its counterpoint *unclean* comprise a prominent theme in Leviticus. The importance of distinctions between the holy and the profane is introduced in [10:10](#). To get a good grasp on Leviticus, it is important to understand what clean and unclean mean and how they relate to holiness.

### **[11:1-8](#)**

#### *Land Creatures*

Chapter 11 explains clean/unclean food regulations in particular. (There is no clear reason for why certain creatures were considered clean and others were not.) Three animal categories are listed: land, water, and flying creatures. These same distinctions are found in [Genesis 1](#), where God creates all life that is in the heavens, on earth, and under the waters.

## **Demystifying Leviticus**

Various Bible translations name different animals as clean or unclean in chapter 11, and the names of the animals listed may not point to the exact creature we think of today. When a translator deals with Hebrew terms and attempts to isolate and identify a specific creature, it is not always easy, or even possible, to do so with exact accuracy. However, that should not affect the understanding of the principles of cleanness and uncleanness.

Two basic stipulations must be met before a land animal can be considered clean and, therefore, something an Israelite could eat: The creature must have a divided split hoof and chew its cud ([11:3](#)). Of course, some animals fit one category but not the other, but the rules are clear that both are necessary ([11:4-8](#)).

## 11:9-12

### *Water Creatures*

To be considered clean, animals that live in the sea have to meet two qualifications as well: They must have fins and scales ([11:9](#)). The Israelites are not only to avoid unclean creatures, but they are to detest them ([11:10-12](#)).

## 11:13-23

### *Flying Creatures*

Instead of qualifications for birds, God provides a list of unclean birds to avoid. The list includes birds that eat other animals or feed off dead carcasses ([11:13-19](#)). Flying insects are also mentioned. Essentially, all flying insects are unclean, unless they have jointed jumper legs ([11:20-23](#)).

## 11:24-47

### *The Solution*

An additional category of unclean animals includes ones that creep or swarm, such as mice and lizards ([11:29-31](#), [41-43](#)).

Touching an unclean creature that is dead would make an Israelite categorically unclean. Even eating a clean animal without going through the proper sacrificial procedure would do the same thing ([11:39](#)). The last half of the chapter provides solutions for the problem of uncleanness.

## Critical Observation

Essentially, the death of even a clean creature made it unclean, which would, of course, make it difficult to eat since generally all animals are killed before they can be eaten. So all meals that include meat would become an act of worship, since the only way an animal could be killed and stay clean is if it were offered as a sacrifice to God in front of the door of the tent of meeting (see [Leviticus 17](#)).

The offenses in chapter 11 are relatively minor, so a person or object could be made clean with water, and the state of uncleanness lasted only until evening ([11:32](#)). The exception is a clay pot or oven; it had to be destroyed ([11:33](#), [35](#)).

“Clean” and “unclean” are categories more than conditions. There is a direct relationship between what is clean and what is holy in scripture. Only what is clean can become holy. God emphasizes the Israelites’ identification as His people by reminding them, “I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy” ([11:45](#) NASB).

## Take It Home

In the Levitical system, those declared unclean by priests suffered both humiliation and isolation. The practical result meant a person could not approach God in worship until made clean again. Being unclean restricted fellowship with both God and other people. In the new system, we have been made clean and acceptable through Christ. We can draw near to God ([James 4:8](#)), and we can be holy as God is holy ([1 Peter 1:15-16](#)).

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[Leviticus 12:1-8](#)

*Clean and Unclean: Mothers Only*

Unclean Mothers [12:1-5](#)

Purification [12:6-8](#)

## Setting Up the Section

Chapters 12-15 continue to define what is unclean, along with the process of purification. Chapters 12 and 15 address uncleanness related to sexual reproduction, and chapters 13 and 14 address skin ailments.

### **[12:1-5](#)**

*Unclean Mothers*

These verses describe the categorical uncleanness a woman experiences after childbirth. The act of having a child itself is not considered sinful, but the flow of blood and other discharges associated with birth cause uncleanness. It may be that reproductive blood and semen are seen as holy fluids. When one comes into contact with something holy it renders one temporarily unclean (note, for instance, that handling the scrolls of scripture make one's hands unclean). (See chapters 15 and 17.)

After the birth of a boy, a woman is isolated at home for seven days. After the child's circumcision on the eighth day, she is required to wait another thirty-three days before worshiping at the sanctuary ([12:2-4](#)). After the birth of a girl, a mother's period of uncleanness doubles, with fourteen days at home and sixty-six days before she is allowed to go to the sanctuary ([12:5](#)). The reason for this discrepancy is unclear, though some think that "life" is the issue here and the longer one is unclean it means the longer one is in contact with principles of life—so, since a baby girl has a womb, the period of uncleanness is twice as long.

## **[12:6-8](#)**

### *Purification*

An unclean mother has to sacrifice both a burnt offering (lamb) and a sin offering (pigeon or dove) to be considered clean again. Provisions are made for mothers without much money by allowing them to substitute two birds for a lamb ([12:6-8](#)).

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## [Leviticus 13:1-59](#)

### *Clean and Unclean: Problem Skin, Mildew*

Rashes and Infections [13:1-23](#)

Spots and Balding [13:24-46](#)

Mildew [13:47-59](#)

## **Setting Up the Section**

The laws in chapters 13 and 14 declare that serious skin disease (physical evidence of decay) made an individual unacceptable before a holy God and unacceptable within the Israelite community. Chapter 13 in particular helps the priests identify these skin disorders.

## **[13:1-23](#)**

### *Rashes and Infections*

If an Israelite had any kind of symptom of a skin disease, he was taken to a priest to be examined through clinical-type instructions ([13:1](#)). A deep sore or raw skin would indicate decay and, therefore, cause a person to be unclean ([13:3](#), [15](#)).

Infection also indicated decay and made a person unclean ([13:6-8](#), [18-23](#)). If a priest was unsure, the affected Israelite was quarantined ([13:5](#)), followed by additional examination ([13:5-7](#), [21](#)). A condition that did not spread was purified through water, but a spreading rash or other disorder pointed to infection ([13:6-8](#)). A chronic disease was also considered infection and made a person unclean for the duration of the disease ([13:9-11](#)). If a disease was cured or shown not to be infectious, the person was considered clean ([13:12-13](#), [23](#)).

While the practices described in this section certainly have potential for health benefits, it appears that, at the most fundamental level, the issue is “wholeness.” Notice in [verse 12](#) that if a person is covered from head to toe, he is considered clean.

## Demystifying Leviticus

The term *leprosy*, used in many Bible translations, is most likely not used to describe the disease we know as leprosy. It is more likely a generic term referring to a number of skin disorders rather than a specific disease. The NIV better translates the original term as “infectious skin disease.”

### [13:24-46](#)

#### *Spots and Balding*

The same rules apply for suspicious spots or burns ([13:24-40](#)). A man who experiences normal balding is clean ([13:40-41](#)), but a disorder on the skin of his head is examined the same way other disorders are examined by a priest ([13:42-44](#)).

Any person found to have an infectious skin disease is to be put outside the camp to live. He was also forced to announce his unclean state to anyone he encountered and to take on the posture of a mourner ([13:45-46](#)). He would also be cut off from fellowship with other Israelites and could not approach God in worship.

### [13:47-59](#)

#### *Mildew*

The Israelites are instructed to deal with mildewed clothing in a similar way to diseased skin. Just as infectious diseases could spread, so could mildew. Priests examined and isolated contaminated clothing ([13:49-51](#)). Clothes with spreading mildew, or mildew that would not wash out, were burned ([13:52](#), [55](#), [57](#)).

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### [Leviticus 14:1-57](#)

#### *Clean and Unclean: Cleaning Infections and Mildew*

#### Outside Camp [14:1-8](#)

Inside Camp [14:9-32](#)

Mildew Matters [14:33-57](#)

## Setting Up the Section

The laws in chapters 13 and 14 declare that serious skin ailments make an individual unacceptable before a holy God and even within the Israelite community. Chapter 14 in particular outlines the purification process.

### [14:1-8](#)

*Outside Camp*

Those with symptoms of skin disease were sent outside the camp in a kind of quarantine, presumably so others would not catch the disease ([14:3](#)). This would have been significant, as it separated an individual from both his community and the sanctuary of God.

## Critical Observation

The Old Testament law says the unclean could never come into the presence of the holy God, yet God's Son took on human flesh and lived among humanity. In His ministry, He avoided the self-righteous, who considered themselves clean by their own merits, and He sought out those who were regarded unclean. The new covenant, in the person of Christ, broke down the barrier that the Old Testament law and its sacrificial system could not. Jesus Himself went "outside the camp," seeking to save the unclean. As Christians, we are called to do likewise ([Hebrews 13:12-13](#)).

If the priest finds the condition to be healed after a week, there is then a cleansing ceremony including hyssop, known for healing properties ([Psalm 51:7](#); [Matthew 27:48](#)), and two clean birds ([Leviticus 14:4-7](#)). Additional bathing and washing then took place, along with shaving all hair to allow the person back into the camp ([14:8](#)).

## Demystifying Leviticus

The killing of a bird in the ceremony was not so much a sacrifice as a symbol. The life of one bird is exchanged for the life of the other, who is given freedom from death and decay and "new" life.

### [14:9-32](#)

## *Inside Camp*

After the ceremonial cleansing, the affected person has seven days of additional examination that includes additional shaving ([14:9](#)). That is followed by the sacrifice of three lambs for guilt, sin, and burnt offerings ([14:10-13](#)), along with a grain offering. The ceremonial smearing of blood ([14:14](#)) is similar to the priestly consecration ritual (see [8:24](#)). The oil ritual ([14:14-18](#)) accompanied the atonement that made the unclean person clean.

Three sacrificial lambs would have been expensive, so special exceptions were made for the poor, as with other offerings ([14:21-22](#)).

## **[14:33-57](#)**

### *Mildew Matters*

Rules relating to mildew (a general term for anything from mold to dry rot), which was something that would cause decay in the home, are similar to those relating to human skin disease ([14:33-57](#)). These instructions deal with the homes the Israelites would build once in Canaan ([14:34](#)). [Verse 34](#) likely indicates that God is the Creator of all living things, not that He is sending mildew as some kind of test or punishment.

The examination periods ([14:37-42](#)) are similar to those for skin disease in chapter 13. In the same way an unclean person is sent out of the camp, contaminated building stones are put outside the city ([14:40](#)). The cleansing ritual for a home ([14:49-53](#)) is the same as for the person who is unclean ([14:4-7](#)).

## **Take It Home**

While the priests could pronounce a person unclean or clean, he could not heal a person with a disease. We see the same thing as the focus in the New Testament turns from external symptoms to what is going on in a person's mind and heart. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day did not have this grasp of the meaning of "clean" and "unclean." They could not understand why He spent time with people considered unclean. They failed to see Him as the One who could make humans clean, the One who could bring wholeness. Let us focus more on what's going on inside ourselves and others, and let us point others toward the restoration found in Christ.

Layman's Bible Commentary - Layman's Bible Commentary – Volume 1: Genesis thru Numbers.

[Leviticus 15:1-32](#)

*Clean and Unclean Discharges*

The Male Kind [15:1-18](#)

The Female Kind [15:19-32](#)

## Setting Up the Section

Chapter 15 picks up where chapter 12 leaves off, declaring certain discharges as unclean. Both men and women have what might be called normal ([15:16-18](#), [19-24](#)) and abnormal ([15:2-15](#), [25-30](#)) discharges. Aside from practical hygienic concerns, the laws once again address the subject of holiness.

### [15:1-18](#)

*The Male Kind*

[Verses 1-12](#) refer to a man with a discharge from his body as unclean. The word translated *body* could mean a person's body, but it is also used as a euphemism for a man's sexual organ. The nature of this particular discharge is not clear, but it is likely some kind of infection. Because infections often contain dead matter, the man would be considered unclean. And since some infections can spread, anything or anyone the man touched would also be unclean.

[Verses 13-15](#) address his purification. Those who touch the unclean man could become clean simply by washing their clothes and bathing ([15:5-12](#)). The man himself has a period of isolation ([15:13](#)) and then can renew relationships with God and fellow Israelites after sacrificing birds as a sin offering and burnt offering ([15:14-15](#)).

[Verses 16-18](#) address semen discharge, a normal male function. The answer to the day-long unclean condition is to bathe and wash any affected clothing. Even intercourse between a married couple resulted in both the man and woman being unclean until evening and having to bathe ([15:18](#)).

### [15:19-32](#)

*The Female Kind*

A woman's regular menstruation would make her unclean for seven days (until the period is completely over). Anything she sat on was considered unclean, and anyone who touched her or anything she had touched would be unclean for a day ([15:19](#)), requiring bathing and washing ([15:20-23](#)). If the woman's husband had sex with her, then he would also be unclean for seven days ([15:24](#)). Purification came through water.

[Verses 25-30](#) address an unusually long period or other associated discharge, which are considered to make a woman unclean. The same rules apply as with normal menstruation ([15:25-](#)

[27](#)), but the woman has to go through the same sacrificial ceremony as the man with the abnormal discharge ([15:14-15](#), [29-30](#)).

### Critical Observation

The laws concerning the unclean state during abnormal discharges ([15:25-30](#)) shed light on the story of the hemorrhaging woman who sought healing from Jesus in [Luke 8:43-45](#). Not only was she seeking physical wholeness, but the healing would bring her relational wholeness as well.

### Take It Home

[Verse 31](#) of this chapter emphasizes the reason for the clean/unclean laws. Since the tabernacle housed the presence of a holy God, those who were declared categorically unclean could not enter into that presence. In addition, the laws reminded the Israelites that they were a people who had been set apart by God. As Christians today, our holiness is not judged by these kinds of laws, but it is good to remember that when we approach God through prayer or worship, we are approaching a holy God.

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## Chapter 11

[11:8](#) God had strictly forbidden eating the meat of certain "unclean" animals; to make sure, he forbade even touching them. He wanted the people to be totally separated from those things he had forbidden. So often we flirt with temptation, rationalizing that at least we are technically keeping the commandment not to commit the sin. But God wants us to separate ourselves completely from all sin and tempting situations. Perhaps this passage has made you aware of areas of your life where you have "technical" innocence but in which you have actually been involved in sin. It's time to cross back over the line and stay there.

[11:25](#) In order to worship, people need to be prepared. Some acts of disobedience, some natural acts (such as childbirth, menstruation, or sex), or some accidents (such as touching a dead or diseased body) would make people ceremonially unclean (defiled) and thus forbidden to participate in worship. This did not imply that they had sinned or were rejected by God, but it insured that all worship was done decently and in order. This chapter describes many of the intentional or accidental occurrences that would disqualify people from worship until they were "cleansed" or straightened out. Similarly, we need to be *prepared* for worship. We cannot live any way we want during the week and then rush into God's presence on Sunday. We should prepare ourselves through repentance, correction of errors where possible, and thoughtful anticipation of what it will mean to be in God's presence with other believers.

[11:44, 45](#) There is more to this chapter than eating right. These verses provide a key to understanding all the laws and regulations in Leviticus. God wanted his people to be *holy* (set apart, different, unique), just as he is holy. He knew they had only two options: to be separate and holy, or to compromise with their pagan neighbors and become corrupt. That is why he called them out of idolatrous Egypt and set them apart as a unique nation, dedicated to worshiping him alone and leading moral lives. That is also why he designed laws and restrictions to help them remain separate—both socially and spiritually—from the wicked pagan nations they would encounter in Canaan. Christians also are called to be holy ([1 Peter 1:15](#)). Like the Israelites, we should remain spiritually separate from the world's wickedness, even though unlike them, we rub shoulders with unbelievers every day. It is no easy task to be holy in an unholy world, but God doesn't ask you to accomplish this on your own. He has provided help. Through the death of his Son, "you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault" ([Colossians 1:22](#)). With Christ, you can live *in* the world without having to be of the world.

[11:47](#) The designations *clean* and *unclean* were used to define the kind of animals the Israelites could and could not eat. There were several reasons for this restricted diet: (1) To ensure the health of the nation. The forbidden foods were usually scavenging animals that fed on dead animals; thus disease could be transmitted through them. (2) To visibly distinguish Israel from other nations. The pig, for example, was a common sacrifice of pagan religions. (3) To avoid objectionable associations. The creatures that move about on the ground, for example, were reminiscent of serpents, which often symbolized sin.

## Chapter 12

[12:1-4](#) Why was a woman considered "ceremonially unclean" after the wonderful miracle of birth? It was due to the bodily emissions and secretions occurring during and after childbirth. These were considered unclean and made the woman unprepared to enter the pure surroundings of the Tabernacle. Her temporary status highlighted her role as a young mother and relieved her of certain duties that probably made the early days with a new baby easier.

[12:1-4](#) *Unclean* did not mean sinful or dirty. God created us male and female, and he ordered us to be fruitful and multiply ([Genesis 1:27, 28](#)). He did not change his mind and say that sex and procreation were now somehow unclean. Instead, he made a distinction between his worship and the popular worship of fertility gods and goddesses. Canaanite religions incorporated prostitution and immoral rites as the people begged their gods to make their crops, herds, and families increase. By contrast, Israel's religion avoided all sexual connotations. By keeping worship and sex entirely separate, God helped the Israelites avoid confusion with pagan rites. The Israelites worshiped God as their loving Creator and Provider, and they thanked him for bountiful crops, marital love, and safe childbirth.

## Chapter 13

[13:1ff](#) Leprosy (here called "a serious skin disease") is a name applied to several different diseases and was greatly feared in Bible times. Some of these diseases, unlike the disease we call leprosy or Hansen's disease today, were highly contagious. The worst of them slowly ruined the

body and, in most cases, were fatal. Lepers were separated from family and friends and confined outside the camp. Since priests were responsible for the health of the camp, it was their duty to expel and readmit lepers. If someone's leprosy appeared to go away, only the priest could decide if that person was truly cured. Leprosy is often used in the Bible as an illustration of sin because sin is contagious and destructive and leads to separation.

[13:45, 46](#) A person with a serious skin disease had to perform this strange ritual to protect others from coming too near. Because the disease described in Leviticus was highly contagious, it was important that people stay away from those who had it.

## Chapter 14

[14:34, 35](#) This mildew was dry rot or mineral crystals affecting stone walls. These specific cleansing procedures designated for mildewed clothing and buildings were fully required by the law ([14:44-57](#)). Why was mildew so dangerous? This fungus could spread rapidly and promote disease. It was therefore important to check its spread as soon as possible. In extreme cases, if the fungus had done enough damage, the clothing was burned or the house destroyed.

[14:54-57](#) God told the Israelites how to diagnose serious skin diseases and mildew so they could avoid them or treat them. These laws were given for the people's health and protection. They helped the Israelites avoid diseases that were serious threats in that time and place. Although they wouldn't have understood the medical reasons for some of these laws, their obedience to them made them healthier. Many of God's laws must have seemed strange to the Israelites. His laws, however, helped them avoid not only physical contamination but also moral and spiritual infection.

The Word of God still provides a pattern for physically, spiritually, and morally healthy living. We may not always understand the wisdom of God's laws, but if we obey them, we will thrive. Does this mean we are to follow the Old Testament health and dietary restrictions? In general, the basic principles of health and cleanliness are still healthful practices, but it would be legalistic, if not wrong, to adhere to each specific restriction today. Some of these regulations were intended to mark the Israelites as different from the wicked people around them. Others were given to prevent God's people from becoming involved in pagan religious practices, one of the most serious problems of the day. Still others related to quarantines in a culture where exact medical diagnosis was impossible. Today, for example, physicians can diagnose the different forms of leprosy, and they know which ones are contagious. Treatment methods have greatly improved, and quarantine for leprosy is rarely necessary.

## Chapter 15

[15:18](#) The verses in this section are not implying that sex is dirty or disgusting. God created sex for (a) the enjoyment of married couples, (b) the continuation of the race, and (c) the preservation of the covenant. Everything must be seen and done with a view toward God's love and ultimate authority. Sex is not separate from spirituality and God's care. God is concerned

about our sexual habits. He designed us, including our sexuality, as wonderfully complex and unified creations. We tend to separate our physical and spiritual lives, but there is an inseparable intertwining. God must be Lord over our whole selves—including our private lives. In what ways do you acknowledge your relationship with God in your sexuality?

**15:32, 33** God is concerned about health. He upholds the dignity of the person, the dignity of the body, and the dignity of the sexual experience. His commands call the people to avoid unhealthy practices and promote healthy ones with practical instructions. Washing was a God-directed means to maintain physical health; acts of purification or cleansing were God-directed means to preserve spiritual dignity. Millennia before the rise of the AIDS epidemic, God's directions already preserved people from known and unknown dangers. This shows God's high regard for sex and sexuality. In our day, sex has been degraded by shocking media exposure. It has become public domain, not private celebration. We are called to have a high regard for sex, both in good health and in purity. Our deepest form of gratitude to God for the gift of sex is expressed in how we use the gift.

Life Application Study Bible.

## Leviticus 11

**11:1-15:33** *The Laws on Cleanness and Uncleanness.* [Leviticus 10:10-11](#) defines the principal duties of the Israelite priesthood. One of these tasks is “to distinguish between the unclean and the clean.” [Chapters 11-15](#) apply this principle to a variety of areas of Israelite life and culture. [Chapter 11](#) deals with the matter of foods that are clean and may be eaten, and foods that are unclean and may not be eaten. [Chapter 12](#) treats the issue of cleanliness and purification after childbirth. The following two chapters ([chs. 13-14](#)) provide regulations concerning cleanliness in matters of fungi, skin diseases, and infections. [Chapter 15](#) considers human bodily discharges that may cause a person to be unclean. These five chapters constitute a codified directory for Israel, and in particular for the priests, that defines what is clean and unclean in God’s sight.

Spectrum of Conditions from Holy to Unclean

<b>Holy</b>		<b>Unclean</b>	
Life			Death
Priests	Physically impaired priests	Clean non-priests	Unclean non-priests
Sacrificial animals	Blemished sacrificial animals	Clean animals	Unclean animals
			Human corpses
			Animal corpses

Grades of Uncleanness

**Tolerated**

**Punishable/Sinful**

Discharges ([Leviticus 12; 16](#)) Forgotten cleansing ([Numbers 5-6; 19](#))

Skin diseases ([Leviticus 13-14](#)) Idolatry, homicide, illicit sex ([Leviticus 17-20; Numbers 35](#))

**[11:1-47](#) Clean and Unclean Creatures.** This chapter explains which creatures were considered clean and which were considered unclean. The *rationale* of why a creature is placed in one category vs. the other has puzzled commentators throughout the ages, and there is still no consensus of opinion. Typical explanations include a concern for hygiene; a “death” motif (i.e., unclean animals were somehow more associated with death in the Israelite mind); and polemics against Canaanite customs. More recently, it has been argued that a creature is unclean when it does not conform to established norms (e.g., an Israelite’s established norm for a four-legged creature would be a cow or a goat, since these were their herd and flock animals; a pig is thus unclean because, even though it has four legs, it is unlike the norm in that it does not chew the cud). In evaluating the above approaches, it is probably fair to say that no single one of them can provide a rationale that works for all the animals in this chapter. As a result, there might be a number of different reasons why an animal was considered clean or unclean. While the *rationale* of the classifications is still debated, the *purpose* of these laws is clear. In brief, they were to help Israel—as the Lord’s holy people—to make distinctions between ritual cleanness and ritual uncleanness ([vv. 46-47](#)). Significantly, making these distinctions in the *ritual* realm would no doubt serve as a constant reminder to the people of their need for making the parallel distinctions in the *moral* realm as well. Further, adherence to these food laws expresses Israel’s devotion to the Lord: just as he separated the Israelites from the other nations, so they must separate clean from unclean foods ([20:24-26](#)). This is why the restrictions can be removed in [Acts 10:9-28](#), when the Jew vs. Gentile distinction is no longer relevant in defining the people of God (cf. also [Mark 7:19; Col. 2:16-23; Heb. 9:1-14; 10:1-18](#)). For Israel to obey these dietary restrictions also shows that the people honor the Creator, who has the right to decide how his creatures may be used. A “clean” animal is one “permitted” for food ([Lev. 11:2](#)). It is clear that classifying an animal as “unclean” is not the same as declaring that animal “evil”: God cares for all beasts, clean and unclean alike (cf. [Ps. 104:17-18; 147:9](#)). Leviticus employs a simple and practical classification system for edible animals, based on readily observable features. It is geared to the kind of life that Israel will live in the land of Canaan, and it is not always easy to apply it to animals that Israelites did not normally encounter (for instance, the sturgeon, which modern rabbis consider to have the wrong kind of scales, is not included here). This system is good for its purpose, a purpose that is different from that of the modern zoologist’s taxonomy. See the parallel list in [Deut. 14:3-21](#) (with notes).

**[11:1-8](#)** The first paragraph deals with land-dwelling animals. In order for a land animal to be considered “clean,” it must meet two conditions: chewing the **cud** and being **cloven-footed**. In practical terms, these criteria permit Israel to eat hoofed mammals with two functional toes, including domestic beasts such as sheep, goats, and cattle, and wild ones such as antelopes (cf. [Deut. 14:4-5](#)). A horse, on the other hand, which has only one toe, is not clean. The diet of these animals is apparently not the basis of their cleanness or uncleanness. The passage itself says nothing about what the animals eat, and the **camel**, **rock badger** (hyrax), and **hare** are exclusively vegetarian but unclean. The **pig** is the only animal in this list that is not strictly vegetarian. (Many of the clean aquatic creatures of [Lev. 11:9-12](#) are carnivorous.) The expression translated **chews the cud** can be applied to camels, rock badgers, and hares ([vv. 4-6](#));

based on the observable features of the animal, the thorough chewing of these animals looks like the cud-chewing of, say, cattle.

**11:9-12** The presence of **fins** and **scales** is the mark for distinguishing between clean and unclean water-dwelling creatures. In practical terms, this limits the clean aquatic animals to what modern zoologists would call true fish; anything aquatic that **has not fins and scales** (e.g., squid, shellfish) is unclean.

**11:13-19** Almost all the unclean **birds** are predators and carrion-eaters (i.e., ones contacting death and consuming blood). The term translated “bird” (Hb. *‘op*) covers a variety of creatures that fly (see ESV footnote), and thus can include the **bat**.

**11:20-23** Insofar as the **winged insects** have an ability to leave the ground, they are clean. For the **locust** and **grasshopper** as allowable food, cf. the diet of John the Baptist ([Matt. 3:4](#)).

**11:24-28** The law gradually introduces the theme of death as a defiling force (see “carcasses” in [vv. 8, 11](#)). The **carcass** of any unclean animal is defiling, i.e., it makes the person who **touches it unclean** for a period (**until the evening**).

**11:29-35** Not only are these creatures unclean for food, but touching them **when they are dead** will also make one defiled.

**11:36-38** It is uncertain why the water in a **spring or a cistern** is not contaminated by an unclean creature that falls into it. Perhaps it is because water in them is naturally flowing and is continuously refreshed and renewed. It may also be an exception because water is in such short supply in Palestine.

**11:39-40** Even the clean quadrupeds are defiling after they have died.

**11:44-45 For I am the LORD.** This self-identification is used here for the first time in the book; it occurs frequently from [ch. 18](#) on. **for I am holy**. Cf. [19:2](#); [20:26](#); [21:8](#). The Lord, who is himself holy, calls his people to **consecrate** themselves, i.e., dedicate themselves to holiness (Hb. *hitqaddesh*), and to **be holy**, i.e., practice a holy lifestyle. Cf. [20:7-8](#) and [note. who brought you up out of the land of Egypt](#). Personal consecration (in which a person imitates God’s own character) is a response to God’s gracious initiative (cf. [Ex. 20:2](#)). [First Peter 1:16](#) applies the same principle to Christian readers, portraying them as the heirs of this special status.

## **Leviticus 12**

**12:1-8 Uncleaness of a Childbearing Mother.** A woman who has just given birth is considered unclean. The loss of blood signifies that one is incomplete and unclean. Three steps are required to move from defilement to purity: (1) the woman is to remain unclean for 7 or 14 days, depending on the gender of the child; (2) she then moves into the second stage, which lasts for 33 to 66 days in which she is neither pure nor impure; and (3) finally, she offers sacrifices in order to enter into full communion with the covenant people. The time of purification for the

mother is twice as long if she gives birth to a female rather than a male. The reason is uncertain, although it may be that the female is *potentially* more unclean because of the probability of her menstruating and of her giving birth. In any event, there is no implication that the reason for the distinction is any kind of presumed “inferiority” of women.

[12:8](#) lamb... two turtledoves. Cf. [5:11](#); and [Luke 2:24](#), indicating the poverty of Jesus’ parents.

## Leviticus 13

[13:1-14:57](#) **Leprous Diseases and Their Purification.** These chapters deal with a specific skin disease called *tsara’at*. [Chapter 13](#) addresses cases of the disease on the human skin ([13:1-46](#)), followed by a case affecting clothes and articles ([13:47-58](#)). [Chapter 14](#) gives the prescribed purificatory rite for the healed person ([14:1-32](#)) along with the purificatory rite for an afflicted house ([14:33-53](#)).

[13:1-59](#) This chapter deals with uncleanness brought about by “leprosy.” The ESV adopts the traditional rendering “leprosy” for the Hebrew *tsara’at*, but its exact modern equivalent is unclear (see ESV footnote on [v. 2](#); cf. also [Matt. 8:2](#) with ESV footnote), particularly in view of the fact that it manifests itself not only in humans but also in clothes and articles ([Lev. 13:47-59](#)), and even in the walls of houses ([14:34-53](#)). The term used in Leviticus is in fact generic: it could include many skin ailments, such as psoriasis, urticaria (hives), favus (which produces honeycomb-shaped crusts), and leukoderma (which produces white patches on the skin). What today is called leprosy (Hansen’s disease) was unknown in the Near East at the time of Leviticus. Clear references to it do not occur until the late first millennium B.C.

[13:1-8](#) Basic symptoms of a **leprous disease** are given in [vv. 2-3](#) (**the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body**). **priest shall pronounce.** By this means, the priest makes the status of uncleanness official. The person receiving such a pronouncement must dwell outside the camp, as stated in [vv. 45-46](#), until he or she becomes clean.

[13:3](#) **unclean** (cf. [v. 8](#)). See [Introduction: Interpretative Issues](#). This requires such persons to live outside the camp until they are free of their disease ([vv. 45-46](#)), and to present a sacrifice as part of a cleansing ceremony ([14:1-32](#)). Modern readers should not confuse this kind of “uncleanness” with “under God’s condemnation,” nor even with “excluded from the love of the community”: the purpose of this law is to prevent what is unclean from coming into contact with what is holy (a contact that would be dangerous for the unclean person and for the whole community).

[13:9-17](#) This is the case of a person with a severe, chronic skin condition. The patient has **raw flesh**, i.e., it is oozing, red, and active. His condition is easily recognizable, and therefore no quarantine is needed. The priest simply declares him ritually **unclean** and impure.

[13:18-44](#) These rules deal with various cases of the leprous disease in relation to other common skin diseases or disorders, such as a **boil** ([vv. 18-23](#)), a **burn** ([vv. 24-28](#)), **itching disease** ([vv.](#)

[29-37](#)), **leukoderma** ([vv. 38-39](#)), and **baldness** ([vv. 40-44](#)). The **priest** is responsible for discerning whether or not the condition is one that makes a person unclean (cf. [10:10-11](#)); this is one way in which the priesthood is to serve the well-being of the people.

[13:45-46](#) The person with a skin disease is to tear his clothes, go about with an unadorned head, and have his beard and mouth covered. These are all signs of mourning in the OT ([Ezek. 24:17, 22](#); [Mic. 3:7](#)). Here they symbolize that a person is ritually dead. Cf. [Luke 17:12-13](#), where lepers “stood at a distance” and called for help from Jesus.

[13:47-59](#) Except for the symptoms and actual treatments such as washing, the procedure of the examination in cases of **leprous disease in a garment** follows that of the cases for humans. Causes of such disease include various molds or fungi. When it becomes clear that the suspected area is affected by the disease, the treatment (i.e., **tear** or **burn** it) is destructive; the object must no longer be used, or has to be completely abandoned.

## **Leviticus 14**

[14:1-32](#) [Chapter 13](#) told how an unclean person is consigned to a place outside the camp. [Chapter 14](#) explains how that person is readmitted into the covenant community.

[14:1-9](#) **Cedarwood**, **scarlet yarn**, and **hyssop** all seem to have cleansing properties (see [Num. 19:6](#)) and are thus used in this two-bird ritual. The release of a live bird into the wilderness is reminiscent of the scapegoat in [Lev. 16:6-10](#). The live bird being driven into the fields may symbolize the patient’s disease being carried outside the camp of Israel.

[14:10-20](#) This final series of sacrifices, focusing on cleansing at the sanctuary, restores the patient to full fellowship as a member of the covenant community. When the three standard offerings are presented—the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the grain offering—then the person has full restoration.

[14:21-32](#) These sacrifices are a concession to the **poor** who **cannot afford** the animals of [vv. 10-20](#). Birds are substituted for the expensive large animals, and the amount of grain required is two-thirds less than the normal amount. Cf. note on [12:8](#).

[14:33-57](#) These laws regarding leprous disease in houses anticipate the time when Israel will settle in the Land of Promise and the people will be living in houses. Houses may become infected with **disease**; this latter term is a general word that may refer to things such as mold, mildew, and fungus. These are unclean and dangerous, and therefore must be eradicated. The priest determines what course of action is to be taken when such a problem occurs.

## **Leviticus 15**

**15:1-33 Discharges from Male and Female Reproductive Organs.** The rules in this chapter are symmetrically structured:

a serious case of male discharge ([vv. 2-15](#))

man's emission of semen ([vv. 16-17](#))

sexual intercourse ([v. 18](#))

female menstruation ([vv. 19-24](#))

a serious case of female discharge ([vv. 25-30](#)).

One characteristic of these regulations is their emphasis on the transmission of contagion from one person to another. Transmission of infection may occur in any number of ways: for example, by sitting on an object that a defiled person had previously sat on, by touching contaminated cooking utensils, and by having direct contact through touching or spitting. No matter how it happens, the person infected is required to separate and to undergo the purification ritual. It is clear that "unclean" is not the same as "sinful," but rather has to do with what is permitted (cf. note on [13:3](#)). The Bible does not view the process of reproduction, with its associated bodily functions, as evil; this is part of the original good creation (even though human nature is severely damaged by the fall of Adam). Certainly the Creator of these functions has the right to tell his obedient creatures how and when to use them.

**15:2 his body.** The Hebrew *basar* (here, "body"; cf. ESV footnote, "flesh") is used euphemistically here for the "genitals." In fact, the same word is used in [v. 19](#) of the female vagina.

**15:16-18** The **emission of semen** is polluting, perhaps because it is the life liquid and its loss makes a man unclean.

**15:19-23** A woman who is menstruating is unclean, and her uncleanness may be transmitted to others. The structure of this passage corresponds to that of the male with a discharge earlier in the chapter.

**15:24** If a man has sexual relations with a woman during her **menstrual** period, then he is considered **unclean** for **seven days**. That is the same length of time as is prescribed for the woman herself. It has often been alleged that this rule conflicts with [18:19](#) and [20:18](#), in which both parties are cut off from Israel. How are these statements to be harmonized? Perhaps the present verse deals only with the ritual implications of the act, or perhaps it is concerned with an inadvertent sexual act, whereas the later texts focus on a brazen breaking of the law. The texts simply seem to be dealing with different circumstances.

**15:25-30** These laws are concerned with irregular or unnatural flows of blood from a female (cf. the woman who has a long-term "discharge of blood" in [Matt. 9:20-22](#); [Mark 5:25-34](#); [Luke 8:43-48](#)).

**[15:31-33](#)** This section concludes with a warning and summary. **You** in [v. 31](#) refers to Moses and Aaron (cf. [v. 1](#) and [10:11](#)). **defiling my tabernacle**. The presence of uncleanness in the camp constantly defiles the sanctuary; this idea prepares for the need for its cleansing in the Day of Atonement ritual (see [16:16](#)).

ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version.