

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS CHAPTER 11

The ceremonial law is described by the apostle ([#Heb 9:9-10](#)) to consist, not only

"in gifts and sacrifices,"

which hitherto have been treated of in this book, but

"in meats, and drinks, and divers washings"

from ceremonial uncleanness, the laws concerning which begin with this chapter, which puts a difference between some sorts of flesh meat and others, allowing some to be eaten as clean and forbidding others as unclean.

"There is one kind of flesh of men."

Nature startles at the thought of eating this, and none do it but such as have arrived at the highest degree of barbarity, and become but one remove from brutes; therefore there needed no law against it. But there is

"another kind of flesh of beasts,"

concerning which the law directs here, [#Le 11:1-8](#),

"another of fishes"

[#Le 11:9-12](#),

"another of birds"

[#Le 11:13-19](#), and

"another of creeping things,"

which are distinguished into two sorts, flying creeping things ([#Le 11:20-28](#)) and creeping things upon the earth, [#Le 11:29-43](#). And the law concludes with the general rule of holiness, and reasons for it, [#Le 11:44](#).

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 8.

Now that Aaron was consecrated a high priest over the house of God, God spoke to him with Moses, and appointed them both as joint-commissioners to deliver his will to the people. He spoke both to Moses and to Aaron about this matter; for it was particularly required of the priests that they should put a difference between clean and unclean, and teach the people to do so. After the flood, when God entered into covenant with Noah and his sons, he allowed them to eat flesh ([#Ge 9:13](#)), whereas before they were confined to the productions of the earth. But the liberty allowed to the sons of Noah is here limited to the sons of Israel. They might eat flesh, but not all kinds of flesh; some they must look upon as unclean and forbidden to them, others as clean and allowed them. The law in this matter is both very particular and very strict. But what reason can be given for this law? Why may not God's people have as free a use of all the creatures as other people?

1. It is reason enough that God would have it so: his will, as it is law sufficient, so it is reason sufficient; for his will is his wisdom. He saw good thus to try and exercise the

obedience of his people, not only in the solemnities of his altar, but in matters of daily occurrence at their own table, that they might remember they were under authority. Thus God had tried the obedience of man in innocency, by forbidding him to eat of one particular tree.

2. Most of the meats forbidden as unclean are such as were really unwholesome, and not fit to be eaten; and those of them that we think wholesome enough, and use accordingly, as the rabbit, the hare, and the swine, perhaps in those countries, and to their bodies, might be hurtful. And then God in this law did by them but as a wise and loving father does by his children, whom he restrains from eating that which he knows will make them sick. Note, The Lord is for the body, and it is not only folly, but sin against God, to prejudice our health for the pleasing of our appetite.

3. God would thus teach his people to distinguish themselves from other people, not only in their religious worship, but in the common actions of life. Thus he would show them that they must not be numbered among the nations. It should seem there had been, before this, some difference between the Hebrews and other nations in their food, kept up by tradition; for the Egyptians and they would not eat together, [#Ge 43:32](#). And even before the flood there was a distinction of beasts into clean and not clean ([#Ge 7:2](#)), which distinction was quite lost, with many other instances of religion, among the Gentiles. But by this law it is reduced to a certainty, and ordered to be kept up among the Jews, that thus, by having a diet peculiar to themselves, they might be kept from familiar conversation with their idolatrous neighbours, and might typify God's spiritual Israel, who not in these little things, but in the temper of their spirits, and the course of their lives, should be governed by a sober singularity, and not be conformed to this world. The learned observe further, that most of the creatures which by this law were to be abominated as unclean were such as were had in high veneration among the heathen, not so much for food as for divination and sacrifice to their gods; and therefore those are here mentioned as unclean, and an abomination, which yet they would not be in any temptation to eat, that they might keep up a religious loathing of that for which the Gentiles had a superstitious value. The swine, with the later Gentiles, was sacred to Venus, the owl to Minerva, the eagle to Jupiter, the dog to Hecate, &c., and all these are here made unclean. As to the beasts, there is a general rule laid down, that those which both part the hoof and chew the cud were clean, and those only: these are particularly mentioned in the repetition of this law ([#De 14:4-5](#)), where it appears that the Israelites had variety enough allowed them, and needed not to complain of the confinement they were under. Those beasts that did not both *chew the cud and divide the hoof* were unclean, by which rule the flesh of swine, and of hares, and of rabbits, was prohibited to them, though commonly used among us. Therefore, particularly at the eating of any of these, we should give thanks for the liberty granted us in this matter by the gospel, which teaches us that *every creature of God is good*, and we are to *call nothing common or unclean*. Some observe a significance in the rule here laid down for them to distinguish by, or at least think it may be alluded to. Meditation, and other acts of devotion done by the hidden man of the heart, may be signified by the chewing of the cud, digesting our spiritual food; justice and charity towards men, and the acts of a good conversation, may be signified by the *dividing of the hoof*. Now either of these without the other will not serve to recommend us to God, but both must go together, good affections in the heart and good works in the life: if either be wanting, we are not clean, surely we are not clean. Of all the creatures here forbidden as unclean, none has been more dreaded and detested by the pious Jews than swine's flesh. Many were put to death by Antiochus because they would not eat it. This, probably, they were most in danger of being tempted to, and therefore possessed themselves and their children with a particular antipathy to it, calling it not by its proper name,

but a *strange thing*. It should seem the Gentiles used it superstitiously (#Isa 65:4), *they eat swine's flesh*; and therefore God forbids all use of it to his people, lest they should learn of their neighbours to make that ill use of it. Some suggest that the prohibition of these beasts as unclean was intended to be a caution to the people against the bad qualities of these creatures. We must not be filthy nor wallow in the mire as swine, nor be timorous and faint-hearted as hares, nor dwell in the earth as rabbits; let not man that is in honour make himself like these beasts that perish. The law forbade, not only the eating of them, but the very touching of them; for those that would be kept from any sin must be careful to avoid all temptations to it, and every thing that looks towards it or leads to it.

Ver. 9. thru Ver. 19.

Here is,

1. A general rule concerning fishes, which were clean and which not. All that had fins and scales they might eat, and only those odd sorts of water-animals that have not were forbidden, #Le 11:9-10. The ancients accounted fish the most delicate food (so far were they from allowing it on fasting days, or making it an instance of mortification to eat fish); therefore God did not lay much restraint upon his people in them; for he is a Master that allows his servants not only for necessity but for delight. Concerning the prohibited fish it is said, *They shall be an abomination to you* (#Le 11:10-12), that is,

"You shall count them unclean, and not only not eat of them, but keep at a distance from them."

Note, Whatever is unclean should be to us an abomination; *touch not the unclean thing*. But observe, It was to be an abomination only to Jews; the neighbouring nations were under none of these obligations, nor are these things to be an abomination to us Christians. The Jews were honoured with peculiar privileges, and therefore, lest they should be proud of those, *Transeunt cum onere--They were likewise laid under peculiar restraints*. Thus God's spiritual Israel, as they are dignified above others by the gospel-covenant of adoption and friendship, so they must be mortified more than others by the gospel- commands of self-denial and bearing the cross.

2. Concerning fowls here is no general rule given, but a particular enumeration of those fowls that they must abstain from as unclean, which implies an allowance of all others. The critics here have their hands full to find out what is the true signification of the Hebrew words here used, some of which still remain uncertain, some sorts of fowls being peculiar to some countries. Were the law in force now, we should be concerned to know with certainty what are prohibited by it; and perhaps if we did, and were better acquainted with the nature of the fowls here mentioned, we should admire the knowledge of Adam, in giving them names expressive of their natures, #Ge 2:20. But the law being repealed, and the learning in a great measure lost, it is sufficient for us to observe that of the fowls here forbidden,

(1.) Some are birds of prey, as the eagle, vulture, &c., and God would have his people to abhor every thing that is barbarous and cruel, and not to live by blood and rapine. Doves that are preyed upon were fit to be food for man and offerings to God; but kites and hawks that prey upon them must be looked upon as an abomination to God and man; for the condition of those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake appears to an eye of faith every way better than that of their persecutors.

(2.) Others of them are solitary birds, that abide in dark and desolate places, as the owl and the pelican (#Ps 102:6), and the cormorant and raven (#Isa 34:11); for God's Israel should not be a melancholy people, nor affect sadness and constant solitude.

(3.) Others of them feed upon that which is impure, as the stork on serpents, others of them on worms; and we must not only abstain from all impurity ourselves, but from communion with those that allow themselves in it.

(4.) Others of them were used by the Egyptians and other Gentiles in their divinations. Some birds were reckoned fortunate, others ominous; and their soothsayers had great regard to the flights of these birds, all which therefore must be an abomination to God's people, who must not learn the way of the heathen.

Ver. 20. thru Ver. 42.

Here is the law,

1. Concerning flying insects, as flies, wasps, bees, &c.; these they might not eat (#Le 11:20), nor indeed are they fit to be eaten; but there were several sorts of locusts which in those countries were very good meat, and much used: John Baptist lived upon them in the desert, and they are here allowed them, #Le 11:21-22.
2. Concerning the creeping things on the earth; these were all forbidden (#Le 11:29-30,41-42); for it was the curse of the serpent that *upon his belly he should go*, and therefore between him and man there was an enmity put (#Ge 3:15), which was preserved by this law. Dust is the meat of the creeping things, and therefore they are not fit to be man's meat.
3. Concerning the dead carcasses of all these unclean animals.

(1.) Every one that touched them was to be unclean until the evening, #Le 11:24-28. This law is often repeated, to possess them with a dread of every thing that was prohibited, though no particular reason for the prohibition did appear, but only the will of the Law-maker. Not that they were to be looked upon as defiling to the conscience, or that it was a sin against God to touch them, unless done in contempt of the law: in many cases, somebody must of necessity touch them, to remove them; but it was a *ceremonial* uncleanness they contracted, which for the time forbade them to come into the tabernacle, or to eat of any of the holy things, or so much as to converse familiarly with their neighbours. But the uncleanness continued only till the evening, to signify that all ceremonial pollutions were to come to an end by the death of Christ in the evening of the world. And we must learn, by daily renewing our repentance every night for the sins of the day, to cleanse ourselves from the pollution we contract by them, that we may not lie down in our uncleanness. Even unclean animals they might touch while they were alive without contracting any ceremonial uncleanness by it, as horses and dogs, because they were allowed to use them for service; but they might not touch them when they were dead, because they might not eat their flesh; and what must not be eaten must not be touched, #Ge 3:3.

(2.) Even the vessels, or other things they fell upon, were thereby made unclean until the evening (#Le 11:32), and if they were earthen vessels they must be broken, #Le 11:33. This taught them carefully to avoid every thing that was polluting, even in their common actions. Not only the vessels of the sanctuary, but every pot in Jerusalem and Judah, must be *holiness to the Lord*, #Zec 14:20-21. The laws in these cases are very critical, and the observance of them would be difficult, we should think, if every thing that a dead mouse or

rat, for instance, falls upon must be unclean; and if it were an oven, or ranges for pots, they must all be broken down, [#Le 11:35](#). The exceptions also are very nice, [#Le 11:36](#), &c. All this was designed to exercise them to a constant care and exactness in their obedience, and to teach us, who by Christ are delivered from these burdensome observances, not to be less circumspect in the more weighty matters of the law. We ought as industriously to preserve our precious souls from the pollutions of sin, and as speedily to cleanse them when they are polluted, as they were to preserve and cleanse their bodies and household goods from those ceremonial pollutions.

Ver. 43. thru Ver. 47.

Here is,

I. The exposition of this law, or a key to let us into the meaning of it. It was not intended merely for a bill of fare, or as the directions of a physician about their diet, but God would hereby teach them to sanctify themselves and to be holy, [#Le 11:44](#). That is,

1. They must hereby learn to put a difference between good and evil, and to reckon that it could not be all alike what they did, when it was not all alike what they ate.
2. To maintain a constant observance of the divine law, and to govern themselves by that in all their actions, even those that are common, which ought to be performed *after a godly sort*, [#3Jo 1:6](#). Even eating and drinking must be by rule, and *to the glory of God*, [#1Co 10:31](#).
3. To distinguish themselves from all their neighbours, as a people set apart for God, and obliged not to walk as the Gentiles: and all this is holiness. Thus these *rudiments of the world* were their tutors and governors ([#Ga 4:2-3](#)), to bring them to that which is the revival of our first state in Adam and the earnest of our best state with Christ, that is, *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord. This is indeed the great design of all the ordinances, that by them we may sanctify ourselves and learn to be holy. Even This law concerning their food, which seemed to stoop so very low, aimed thus high, for it was the statute law of heaven, under the Old Testament as well as the New, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. The caution therefore ([#Le 11:43](#)) is, *You shall not make yourselves abominable*. Note, By having fellowship with sin, which is abominable, we make ourselves abominable. That man is truly miserable who is in the sight of God abominable; and none are so but those that make themselves so. The Jewish writers themselves suggest that the intention of this law was to forbid them all communion by marriage, or otherwise, with the heathen, [#De 7:2-3](#). And thus the moral of it is obligatory on us, forbidding us to *have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*; and, without this real holiness of the heart and life, *he that offereth an oblation is as if he offered swine's blood* ([#Isa 66:3](#)); and, if it was such a provocation for a man to eat swine's flesh himself, much more it must be so to offer swine's blood at God's altar; see [#Pr 15:8](#).

II. The reasons of this law; and they are all taken from the Law-maker himself, to whom we must have respect in all acts of obedience.

1. *I am the Lord your God*, [#Le 11:44](#).

"Therefore you are bound to do thus, in pure obedience."

God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, oblige us to do whatever he commands us, how much soever it crosses our inclinations.

2. *I am holy, #Le 11:44, and again, #Le 11:45.* If God be holy, we must be so, else we cannot expect to be accepted of him. His holiness is his glory (#Ex 15:11), and therefore it *becomes his house for ever, #Ps 93:5.* This great precept, thus enforced, though it comes in here in the midst of abrogated laws, is quoted and stamped for a gospel precept, #1Pe 1:16, where it is intimated that all these ceremonial restraints were designed to teach us that we must not *fashion ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance, #Le 11:14.*
3. *I am the Lord that bringeth you out of the land of Egypt, #Le 11:45.* This was a reason why they should cheerfully submit to distinguishing laws, having of late been so wonderfully dignified with distinguishing favours. He that had done more for them than for any other people might justly expect more from them.

III. The conclusion of this statute: *This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, &c., #Le 11:46-47.* This law was to them a statute for ever, that is, as long as that economy lasted; but under the gospel we find it expressly repealed by a voice from heaven to Peter (#Ac 10:15), as it had before been virtually set aside by the death of Christ, with the other ordinances that *perished in the using: Touch not, taste not, handle not, #Col 2:21-22.* And now we are sure that *meat commends us not to God (#1Co 8:8),* and that *nothing is unclean of itself (#Ro 14:14),* nor does that defile a man which goes into his mouth, but that which comes out from the heart, #Mt 15:11. Let us therefore,

1. Give thanks to God that we are not under this yoke, but that to us every creature of God is allowed as good, and nothing to be refused.
2. *Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free,* and take heed of those doctrines which *command to abstain from meats,* and so would revive Moses again, #1Ti 4:3-4.
3. Be strictly and conscientiously temperate in the use of the good creatures God has allowed us. If God's law has given us liberty, let us lay restraints upon ourselves, and never feed ourselves without fear, lest our table be a snare. *Set a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite; and be not desirous of dainties or varieties, #Pr 23:2-3.* Nature is content with little, grace with less, but lust with nothing.