

## “Spiritual Holiness Not Physical Health” (Lev. 11)

### 1. Preface

For those who wrongly attribute Christian Nationalism as a theocracy and then dismiss such fail to apply the same scrutiny to their own adherences; viz. Covid 19 policies and the religion of wokeism dictating anti-biblical policies to the administrations of government, education, Big Eva, medical, media, marketing, sports teams, etc. In *Leviticus* we see a true theocracy on earth where God alone governed legislatively, judicially, and executively – at first in earnest via personal and direct governance as seen in the exodus from Egypt and beginnings of their wilderness journey, and with the immediate incorporation of priests before the monarchy of kings and office of prophets were established. And in this theocracy, God had determined laws of worship, morality, civility, slavery, etc. But the most precise and particular laws which occupied the Hebrew life were the holiness laws. The Pharisees in Jesus’ day had so preoccupied themselves with ceremonial holiness that they missed the intent of such laws viz. to point their hearts toward God by considering His holiness and their sinfulness.

### 2. Presuppositions

- a. Holiness was opposite of common.
- b. Common included clean and unclean categories.
- c. Common could be sanctified and what was sanctified could become profaned.
- d. Therefore, God’s people were to maintain cleanness in order to be sanctified and set apart from even the common. Unfortunately, many, if not most, professing Christians today are content with being common, if not unclean, rather than living sanctified lives which serve to convict the world of its sin and of God’s holiness, and Christ’s coming judgment cf. Jn. 16:18-11.
- e. The discrimination of clean and unclean animals served as a constant reminder of Israel’s duty to holiness. And what distinguished said animals was observed in their appearance, functionality, and behavior.
- f. Some commentators are unpersuasive, interpreting this chapter as primarily dietary laws as in physical hygiene (discussed below). It is also doubtful that these are neither arbitrarily categorized creatures to test Israel’s’ obedience nor cultic laws purposed to combat the Pagan practices; as they (Pagans) had shared sacrificial animals and unclean animals. The key to proper emphasis is found in vv. 44-45 which state the purpose for mentioned laws. And I will use such for interpretation and application.

### 3. Parallels

- a. Categories
  - i. Environments
    1. Water
    2. Air
    3. Land
  - ii. Status of creatures w/ respect to their environments
    1. Appearance and Locomotion e.g. non scaled fish resemble the cursed serpent and shell fish scavenge the waste while clean fish have scales and fins for normal means of propulsion.
    2. Functionality and Practice e.g. clean fleshly animals tread on hooves and chew effectively, modeling both a connection to the earth but a

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proper relationship to it as man the highest of land creatures. Their skin avoids the earth unlike reptiles and other unclean animals.

“Animals with handlike paws are behaving ‘unnaturally’ by using their hands for walking. By using an inappropriate means of locomotion they are shown to be unclean.”<sup>36 1</sup> And unlike the hooved animals which indiscriminately swallowed w/o chewing, the clean chew discriminating/digesting their intake as the wise and holy human must practice.

3. Behavior/Obedience e.g. clean fowl is seen as aligning with the blood laws. Gordon Wenham summarized the following content: “Of winged creatures not only birds of prey ... but also marsh birds and others, which live on worms, carrion and all sorts of impurities.”<sup>29</sup> Most modern commentators agree that it is the symbolism of preying on other animals that makes birds of prey unclean. They are killers, or blood-drinkers; and thus they break the law. [See also Gen. 1:29-30; Exod. 21:28] Douglas<sup>30</sup> points out that in Israel animals were expected to obey covenant law. Both man and his beasts are required to keep the sabbath (Exod. 20:10). The first-born of animals were consecrated to sacrifice (Exod. 22:29–30), just as the first-born among men were dedicated to the priesthood. Because these birds’ eating patterns break the fundamental principle of not eating flesh with blood in it, they are declared unclean just as men who eat flesh without draining off the blood become unclean (Lev. 17).”<sup>2</sup>

### iii. Status of animals paralleled with humans

1. Common (Unclean): The state of humans and animals
2. Common (Clean): Israel and clean animals
3. Holy: Sanctified and sacrificed to God i.e. priests and sacrificial animals

### b. Conditions

- i. Holiness is life as conforms to God and uncleanness is defacement indicative of death which is the contrast to God’s intent, creation, and perfection.
- ii. The ceremonial laws – **these are ceremonial not primarily dietary laws** – leading to holiness and life whereas uncleanness and the corrupted (profane) lead to death. Re: life and death, a linier chart may be helpful to observe:

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<sup>6</sup> 36 *Purity and Danger*, p. 56, followed by Porter, p. 90. Douglas also suggests this could explain why the animals listed in vv. 29–30 are banned: their forefeet are uncannily handlike! More probably they are unclean for swarming.

<sup>1</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (pp. 177–178). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>9</sup> 29 Keil, *Biblical Archaeology II*, pp. 118f.

<sup>0</sup> 30 *Daedalus* 101 (1972), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (pp. 174–175). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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Life – Holiness – Clean – Unclean – Death

- iii. That one could be ceremonially clean yet a violator in heart/spirit would not fool God. And if the laws were for mere dietary health, Jesus would not have abrogated such (Mat. 15:11). More on that subsequently. Wenham explained:

There are good reasons for believing that they did not see these provisions as hygienic.

**First**, hygiene can only account for some of the prohibitions. Some of the clean animals are more questionable on hygienic grounds than some of the unclean animals.<sup>8</sup> If ancient Israel had discovered the dangers of eating pork, they might also have discovered that thorough cooking averts it. In any event, trichinosis is rare in free-range pigs. Among the Arabs camel flesh is regarded as a luxury, though Leviticus brands it as unclean.

**Secondly**, the OT gives no hint that it regarded these foods as a danger to health. Motive clauses justifying a particular rule are a very characteristic feature of OT law, yet there is never a hint that these animal foods must be avoided because they will damage health. Yet this would surely have constituted an excellent reason for avoiding unclean food.

**Third**, why, if hygiene is the motive, are not poisonous plants classified as unclean?

**Finally**, if health were the reason for declaring certain foods unclean in the first place, why did our Lord pronounce them clean in his day?

Evidence is lacking that the Middle Eastern understanding of hygiene had advanced so far by the first century a.d. that the Levitical laws were unnecessary. Indeed, if the primary purpose of the food laws was hygienic, it is surprising that Jesus abolished them.<sup>3</sup>

- iv. Perhaps another model or type of the three tiered classification is the Tabernacle itself where the unclean world dwells outside the facility, cleansed Israel in the courtyard, and the holy priesthood in the Tent itself – yet still w/in the Tent is reserved for the only innately and perpetually perfect Holy One. We will see that His purpose for the laws and many more realities are to unite all together in Himself.
- v. Such are matters of ultimate spiritual condition viz. life and death. And why such are conveyed in terms of what the Hebrews could eat and not eat are perhaps best summarized in Jesus’ words, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day...” (Jn. 6:53-54). Nobuyoshi Kiuchi wrote, “Contrary to all the commentators, it is wrong to assume that a clean person has life, whereas the unclean does not. *No-one* has it, and because of that a

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<sup>8</sup> J. Simoons, *Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances in the Old World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1961), pp. 37ff.

<sup>3</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (pp. 167–168). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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clean person becomes defiled by coming into contact with unclean creatures or things.”<sup>4</sup> [Thus because Jesus was holy, He was not defiled by disease etc.] Perfect life and holiness are only found in God while all else would fall under the Common category. The Tabernacle helps to distinguish the categories of people’s condition which corresponds to Israel’s status regarding clean and unclean creatures. For example: All outside the courtyard are common and unclean, all within the courtyard are common and clean, and all within the holy place are the consecrated (holy) priests. Likewise, there are unclean animals, clean animals, and consecrated animals for sacrifice.

### 4. Practice (29-42)

- a. Along with all of creation, the animal kingdom is effected by the Fall and thus reflected in nature. In other words, God’s creation still has order though animals in it reflect the defacement of sin. Order not chaos is the goal of creation, and this principle applies as much to motion as to species. Priests with deformities were prohibited from approaching God’s holiness (Lev. 21:16-17) and here is the point. God is holy and nothing unclean can survive in His presence. The deformities, not unlike these – to be described creatures – cannot be reckoned as clean and acceptable for man nor God. It may seem harsh or even bigoted but w/o knowledge of the Holy One’s utter holiness, one cannot understand His compassion. Jesus, who was untainted by the diseased and deformed, rather healed them than reject them. “Since the main animal categories are defined by their typical movement, ‘swarming,’ which is not a mode of propulsion proper to any particular element, cuts across the basic classification. Swarming things are neither fish, flesh nor fowl. Eels and worms inhabit water, though not as fish; reptiles go on dry land, though not as quadrupeds; some insects fly, though not as birds. There is no order in them.... The prototype and model of the swarming things is the worm. As fish belong in the sea, so worms belong in the realm of the grave with death and chaos.”<sup>37</sup> If this explanation is correct, the underlying theology is the same as before. Only animals that are true examples of each type are clean. Others which transgress the norms of locomotion are unclean in themselves and convey impurity to others when dead.”<sup>5</sup>
- b. Contra to the world’s attitude of “It’s my life and I’ll do it my way,” which leads to death; God’s prescription leads to life. In vv. 29-42 we see further instructions to avoid creatures of all three categories (land, air, sea) which are creepers. The term is more accurately translated “swarming” which conveys a chaotic, haphazard, un-purposed motion. I also like ‘creeping’ because it conveys a deceptive and covert scrounging for scraps if not a conniving covert usurping mode – like that of the serpent. I believe the overall point is contrasting the unclean creeping/swarming creatures with the properly practicing clean creatures. It’s a contrast of the haphazard, undirected, chaotic, helter-skelter, whimsical, scrounging animal vs the orderly, purposed, efficient, dignified animal. In human terms: a mischievous,

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<sup>4</sup> Kiuchi, N. (2007). *Leviticus* (D. W. Baker & G. J. Wenham, Eds.; Vol. 3, p. 212). Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

<sup>7</sup> *37 Purity and Danger*, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (p. 178). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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covert, aimless, selfish, scrounging creep vs an upright, transparent, purposed, efficient, contributing dignitary who behaves according to God’s design – not his own destructive carnal agendas. It’s God’s creation, design, and intent; therefore, we ought to do it His way!

### 5. Purpose (43-47)

- a. As mentioned at the onset, our key to interpretation is found in these concluding verses.
- b. The warning regarding unclean animals is not bad health but defilement v. 43. The prohibition of unclean animals and the exhortation is holiness v. 44. God had liberated them and called them to be set apart (v. 45) as a nation of priests (cf. Exod. 19). Like shrimp and pork; tattoos, mixed crops, and multi fabric clothes are permitted if used with thanksgiving and good conscience.
- c. The purpose is holiness not health. It is life not mere sustenance. It is righteousness not self-righteousness. It is loyalty not ceremonial obedience. And such is why the hard-hearted Pharisees who were ritually clean were far removed from God cf. Isa. 29:13-14 cf. Mat. 15:8-9.
- d. Devotion not Diet: Mk. 7:14-23 \*v. 18. Furthermore, Paul reiterated Jesus’ abrogation of these laws (Ro. 14:14, 20; Titus 1:15). What’s more, Peter was given a vision (Acts 10:10-15) which both acknowledged Jesus’ words while on earth, and pointed to the heart of the matter that viz. Christ is the true and only cleansing agent who reconciles any who turn to Him and receive Him in faith hence the mention of Jn. 6:53-4 above.
- e. Therefore, when the food laws were abrogated, so too the special distinction of Israel as a chosen nation. “In John’s Gospel we see Jesus putting his teaching into practice (e.g. Mat. 21:43) by asking for a drink from a Samaritan woman. In 4:9 the woman expresses surprise that Jesus as a Jew should be prepared to accept a drink from a Samaritan, “For Jews do not drink from the same vessels as Samaritans” (cf. NE<sup>B</sup> translation). The food laws were an assertion of Israel’s distinctiveness; to remove them was to put into question her special status. This comes out more clearly in the story of Cornelius.”<sup>6</sup>
- f. It is no coincidence that God gave the unclean animal vision before sending him to Cornelius.
- g. Read Acts 10:34-36; 15:7-9; Ro. 11 (grafting both Jew and Gentile into one tree) cf. 9:6-8; 2:28-29; Eph. 2:11-16. Wenham rightly concluded, “the requirement of circumcision and the distinction between clean and unclean animals were abolished. This is sometimes seen as a compromise between the Jewish and Gentile wings of the Church. There may well have been an element of this in their decision, but it is possible to see a theological basis for their conclusion. The rite of circumcision and the distinction between clean and unclean animals were particularly associated with the special status of Israel as the covenant people, whereas the prohibition on blood (and strangled meat) went back earlier to the time of Noah (Gen. 9:4). **It was the laws distinguishing Israel from the other nations that were set aside, not the**

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<sup>B</sup> NEB New English Bible

<sup>6</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (p. 182). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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- older moral principles that applied to all men** (emphasis added).<sup>7</sup> →
- h. Therefore, due to Christ’s person and work, either one is in Him, the last Adam, or in the first Adam who brought death to all men (Ro. 5:12ff.). There are no sub-distinctions of value or priority in the Bride of God. In fact, ancient national Israel was considered God’s Bride and the Church is Christ’s Bride. God is not a polygamist! Jesus thus takes us forward to how creation was originally aimed – before there was a national Israel – and has made one man from both Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). Wenham wrote, “The NT believer is in a very similar position. The Church is now “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet. 2:9) [BTW, Peter uses the same four descriptive words for the Church as God did for what He intended for Israel (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-5 w/ Exod. 19:5-6)]. They are bidden to set their “minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth” (Col. 3:2), to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:18). Though the Christian is so much more privileged than ancient Israel, it is easy to take for granted the grace that has been given him and fail to acknowledge it. The ancient food laws were designed to curb such forgetfulness.”<sup>8</sup>
  - i. Therefore; like all other laws, types, events, sacrifices, Tabernacle, and priesthood, Jesus’ person and work fulfilled these food laws by making any and all persons unified with and in Him; holy – sanctifying them from the world and unto the blessed service and fellowship of God as priests and ambassadors to a lost, unclean, and dying world.

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In 1 Tim. 4:8 Paul acknowledged that physical health is of value “for a while” but spiritual health i.e. “godly training” is of everlasting value. Some of us Americans are over preoccupied with diet and exercise and some are totally negligent in such matters. Perhaps finding the balance isn’t in food nor exercise but in Christ. When we feed on Christ (Jn. 6:53-54) we have eternal life and will thus learn to properly order our lives with more and more balance. Such wisdom benefits all areas of life including physical health, financial health, relational health, professional health, etc. Superior to and source of all of these is spiritual health and its source and means is holiness. Jesus summed it up, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Mat. 6:33 ESV). God laid down the food laws not for physical health but spiritual health. Considering the creatures in their fallen states, their environments, their appearances, and their behaviors served as reminders of man’s sin and the Fall as well as God’s holiness and intent for creation. And the ceremonies to regain cleanness point to the Remedy of the Redeemer Himself, who will reconcile all creation (Ro. 8:20ff.) from the Fall back unto Himself.

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<sup>7</sup> Wenham, G. J. (1979). *The Book of Leviticus* (p. 183). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

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