
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HOLY?

Leviticus 11 (1-3, 9, 13-20, 41-47)

All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable...

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

I. Clean

God sets the boundaries for what is edible by organizing all animals by how they move and eat:

- Walk/Land (3-8): “Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud” is allowed.
- Swim/Water (9-12): “Everything in the waters that has fins and scales” is allowed.
- Fly/Air (13-23): Insects that move predictably like locusts are allowed (no swarmers). Carnivorous birds (13-19) and “all winged insects that go on all fours” (20-23) are prohibited.

Some common attempts to make sense of the food laws:

- Arbitrary: Only God knows why and He’s not telling
Problem: How do we make the link between these rules and God’s holiness (44-45)?
- Cultic: Unclean animals are those used in pagan worship
Problem: Pagans used bulls, sheep, and goats; sometimes they worshipped them!
- Hygienic: Unclean animals are carriers of disease
Problems:
 - That link isn’t made in the text, or elsewhere
 - Clean animals carry diseases too
 - Wouldn’t dangerous plant food be listed as well?
- Symbolic: The clean animals represent righteous Israelites; the unclean, the rest of humanity
Problem: This can become highly speculative (i.e., *how* do they represent these?)
- Class Purity: “Individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong.” The “normal” animals in each class taught the Israelites holiness by demonstrating purity. A walking insect with wings was abnormal. Each clean animal was just “one thing” according to its sphere.
Rationale: The principle of “be just one thing” shows up elsewhere in Levitical law – “You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material” (Lev 19:19). (Adapted from Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.)

II. Cleansed

Mark 7:14-19 – where Jesus “declared all foods clean”

Acts 10:9-16 – where Peter hears, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” A particular link in Acts 10 is made between the repeal of the dietary laws and the fact that, in the messianic age, “God shows no partiality” in regard to nationality.

III. Cleansing

The work of Christ has made the span of our diets reflect the span of His kingdom. If fine lobster bisque or pork tenderloin medallions drive home the goodness of God to us, so would more meaningful interaction with Christians who are African-American, Asian, Hispanic, etc.

BRIAN HABIG, “THE ABC’S OF REDEMPTION: THE GOSPEL IN LEVITICUS”
