

JUST DO IT

LEVITICUS 11:1-47

**GOD'S PART IN OUR HOLINESS IS TO APPLY THE BLOOD OF JESUS TO OUR LIVES.
OUR PART IN HOLINESS IS SIMPLY TO OBEY.**

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Leviticus 11:1-47

We have just studied through the ordination of the priests and the anointing of the Tabernacle, the worship utensils, and the entire Tabernacle area. And then on their first day at work, God killed two priests because of their careless or rebellious handling of holy things.

In a final warning to the three remaining priests, God told them to stay away from alcohol before coming on duty or while on duty. The reason He gave is because they would have to make distinctions between common and holy, along with clean and unclean for the people they were serving.

Today's text starts laying out the criteria by which things are determined to be holy or common, clean or unclean. I'm not sure if the Israelites understood the reasoning as to why some animals were clean while others were unclean. I'm sure that I don't fully understand the distinctions. However, whether the Israelites understood or not, they had just witnessed God dramatically killing two priests by smoking them on the spot with fire.

I know that we don't like to take this type of an attitude because we are taught to question everything. However, I have come to the point in my life where I realize that I will never understand all of God's reasons in this life. But I will simply submit to what He is doing in my life, and humbly obey what He commands. After all, He is God.

I kind of learned this attitude from a young man whom I was doing premarital counseling with. His name was Brian. His fiancée's name was Mary. They had finally set the date and they were so excited about it. They chose Valentine's Day weekend. I said, "How did you guys happen to choose that date?"

Mary said, "We decided to get married close to Valentine's Day because it is so romantic."

I looked at Brian. He responded, "I just do what I'm told."

Brian learned quickly what it takes most of us to learn in ten years or so. It's kind of funny in Brian's case, but in dealing with God's commands, we really should do what we're told, even though we may not understand it or don't like it.

I know that as we read and study through these types of animals and how we are to handle them, it may seem tedious. But I have friends who still eat kosher. They take these passages very seriously. They don't find these laws tedious at all. It simply takes them a little extra planning.

As I preach through these passages, I'm not advocating that we go back to eating kosher. What I am advocating is the main idea of this morning's passage. **GOD'S PART IN OUR HOLINESS IS TO APPLY THE BLOOD OF JESUS TO OUR LIVES. OUR PART IN HOLINESS IS SIMPLY TO OBEY.** What I would like to do with today's text is to explain what it meant for the Hebrews, and then try to draw some principles for us from it. Let's start with our misunderstanding about being saved by grace through faith. Somehow Christians feel this is a new way in which God approaches us in comparison to the Israelites. Keep in mind that the passage we are studying this morning was written just about one year after God delivered the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt.

God made it clear to the Hebrews that He was not choosing them because they were better, smarter, more powerful, or even more holy than the rest of the people on earth. In fact, He chose them because they were the weakest and most pathetic nation on the face of the earth at that time. It was simply by grace through faith they were saved. They were not more holy than the Egyptians when the Angel of Death passed over. It was simply a matter of the Hebrews putting blood over their doorposts in faith that saved them. God gathered them together around Himself in the desert and made them His chosen people. At this point He commanded them to be holy because He was holy. And then He spells out for them how they can pursue holiness.

We Christians come to be God's chosen people the same way. We were pathetic sinners, hopelessly in bondage to sin, Satan, this world, and death. By simply placing our faith in the precious blood of Jesus, by grace, God gathered us together around Himself to make us the church. And now, as His children, He commands us to be holy because He is holy. Only in our case, it will be not in keeping kosher and following different protocols. It will be in conducting ourselves in prescribed thoughts, attitudes, speech, and behavior.

I. DON'T EAT (VS 1-23)

We Won't Always Be Able to Understand God's Reasons But God Still Expects Obedience.

In verses 1-23, God tells the Hebrews what they are not supposed to eat. For us, the message in this section could be **WE WON'T ALWAYS BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S REASONS BUT GOD STILL EXPECTS OBEDIENCE.** I think that it is o.k. to try and figure out God's reasons for commanding certain things, but the bottom line is that we are expected to obey whether we understand or not. Let me just give you two quick examples from our culture. The Bible is very clear about Christians dating non-Christians. Christians are not supposed to date non-Christians. There is no uncertainty about that. If you have ever tried to explain the reasons for this to a Christian boy or girl who is dating a non-Christian, you quickly realize that even though you can give good reasons, they won't believe you. To be sure, after they marry this non-Christian, they will clearly understand, but by then it will be too late. The attitude of a Christian young person should be this.

I don't understand why God would command me not to date a non-Christian, but because I love God more than anyone or anything, I will obey. The same goes with listening to certain types of music, watching certain types of movies, engaging in premarital, extramarital, or homosexual sex. There are many things that I do not understand, but I do know that I love God and whatever He commands, I want to do.

A. GOD SAID SO (1-2a)

Why should the Hebrews eat certain foods and abstain from others? Because as verse one through the first half of verse 2 illustrates, "Because God said so."

The passage starts out, "Jehovah said to Moses and Aaron, 'Say to the Israelites.'" God uses His covenant Name here and by doing so, wants to remind them that not only does He live in the Worship Tent, and the Tabernacle area, He is present all throughout the Hebrew camp. Therefore, it is important that every person and every tent in the camp be clean. The lesson God is teaching them and us is that holiness applies to every part of our lives. Holiness is not something we do on Sundays at church. Holiness is what is to characterize our entire lives: work, school, social settings, at home, and at play.

Chapters 11-15 are all about ritual purity. This morning we are going to start with God's commands concerning which animals are clean and which are unclean. Jews who follow these dietary laws today refer to this as keeping kosher. Even today, it is a very involved process for a restaurant or a butcher to be legitimately verified as kosher. A rabbi must inspect it and authenticate it.

Over the years, there have been many attempts at explaining the reasoning for the restricted diets. The first obvious explanation has been that God made the list of clean and unclean animals because of health reasons. The reasoning is that animals like pigs carry trichinosis and other diseases. The fish that are declared unclean are generally bottom feeders like carp or catfish. On the surface, this looks good. However, we are judging this by our world today. For example, if one were to examine a carp or catfish from a polluted river or lake, we would notice that the color of the fish is muddy, brown, gray and dirty. However, if we were to look at carp

or catfish caught from a pure river or spring fed lake, we would notice the color to be beautiful, like other fish.

And in regards to meat, the neighboring cultures ate pork and other animals without any problems. The ancient cultures knew how to cook and preserve meats.

When God declares to the Hebrews some animals are clean, unclean, or detestable, He is not saying they are to be hated and killed. At creation, God created all the animals and after He saw them, He said they were good. Jesus seems to say that it isn't what a person eats that defiles us. It's what's already inside of us that defile us. Jesus graphically points out that food goes in the mouth, through the stomach, the digestive system, and all comes out in the end. So although people make a convincing case that God declared these animals hygienically unclean doesn't convince me.

Others have said that the distinction was made symbolically of life. For example fish are supposed to have fins and scales. Those that don't do not conform to the pattern of their species. They would argue for us something like conforming to our nature would be to be heterosexual. Homosexuality would not be conforming to the norm of creation. I'm not convinced by the symbolic interpretation.

There are also people who treat it allegorical. For example, they would say that a fish without scales is slippery and slimy. That would describe people who are loose, fickle, and insincere. I am also not convinced with this view either.

There is also a view that says the reason is for ascetic reasons. Their view is that God was teaching the Hebrews to deny themselves of certain pleasures.

If you want to read more about these views, Derek Tidball in his commentary on Leviticus summarizes these and many other views. All of them seem to me to have some merit, but in the end, I'm not convinced by any of them. I would say this. I'm not sure if the Hebrews understood the reasoning or not. But given the fact they saw God kill the firstborn child of every household in Egypt, watched the entire Egyptian Army drown before their eyes, and saw God fry two priests right there in public worship was enough reason for them to simply obey.

B. LAND ANIMALS (2b-8)

In the second half of verse 2 through verse 8, God makes distinctions between the clean and unclean land animals. This is pretty simple. Animals whose hooves are completely slit and who chew the cud are considered to be clean. They need to meet both these qualifications. Just so there are no mistakes, God further clarifies. Pigs have split hooves but do not chew the cud. Camels, Conies, and rabbits chew the cud but they don't have split hooves. These animals do not meet both qualifications so they are unclean. It's as simple as that.

Wow, that seems really restrictive doesn't it? That's the way we think. We always want to focus on what we are not supposed to have or what we can't have. Adam and Eve had thousands of good choices. They could eat freely from any of the trees in the garden. They were only forbidden to eat from one tree. And yet, that's exactly where we find them, with their attention on the one bad choice.

If you were to turn over to Deuteronomy 14, a sample list of clean animals is given. The Hebrews could eat ox, sheep, goat, deer, gazelle, wild goat, ibex, antelope, and mountain sheep. There were tons of good choices to eat.

But their neighbors and all the people they would come in contact with would be eating all the forbidden foods to the Hebrews.

There are two lessons I want to stop and point out. By declaring these foods unclean, God was forcing the Hebrews to be separate from the ungodly people around them and to be a witness to them. If offered pork for dinner, the Hebrew would have to politely refuse and explain why he couldn't eat it.

Secondly, we have tons of good choices. We need to focus on the good choices and what we have, not on what is forbidden and what we don't have. Let me give you an example. I know a lot of young people who want to get married. It seems as if they cannot find the right person. Instead of fretting over the situation, or getting involved sexually hoping to get someone, or starting to date non-Christians, they should use their freedom to do things they won't be able to do once they do get married. I tell young people to travel extensively, take up new hobbies, and study things they never had time for before. There are a ton of good things to do as a single. Think about going on a mission's trip.

C. WATER ANIMALS (9-12)

In verses 9-12 water animals are separated. Again, this is pretty simple. If a fish has scales and fins, they are clean. If not, the Hebrews are not to eat them. This would rule out shellfish, carp, catfish, eel, clams, oysters, muscles, etc. However, think of the multitude of fish one could eat. The oceans, streams, and lakes are filled with fish that have both fins and scales.

D. BIRDS (13-19)

Verses 13-19 separate the birds. Most commentators admit that it is pretty difficult to identify exactly what these birds are. But in general, they seem to be flesh eaters. I'm not sure what the distinguishing mark is, but there were plenty of birds that were identified as clean and they were in abundance.

E. INSECTS (20-23)

I find it interesting that there were even certain types of insects that were o.k. to eat in verses 20-23. For me, it's not really necessary to know this because I don't plan on eating any insects soon. It's not so interesting for me the list of insects that the Hebrews were not allowed to eat as it interests me that they can eat like all kinds of locust, crickets, grasshoppers, etc.

I'm not really sure why God set some animals apart as clean and others unclean. He makes it pretty simple to determine which are clean and which are unclean. Whether they Hebrews understood why God did this or not, is really irrelevant. They were simply commanded to do it. It was a matter of obedience.

What is it in your life this morning that you are not obeying God with? We can come up with all sorts of good reasons why we are not obeying, but the bottom line is this. **WE WON'T ALWAYS BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S REASONS BUT GOD STILL EXPECTS OBEDIENCE.**

Maybe there is a relationship you have to break off. Maybe there is someone you need to apologize to. Maybe there is someone you need to forgive. Maybe you need to get rid of some unhealthy or unclean thoughts or behaviors. It really doesn't matter if you understand or even feel like it. The only way we can demonstrate our love for God is through obedience. Obedience is our participation in God's holiness.

II. DON'T TOUCH (VS 24-31)

The Things Of This World Are Marked By Death. We Must Be Careful Not To Get Contaminated By Them.

Verses 24-31 lay out rules for things the Hebrews are commanded not to touch. For us, we must remember that **THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD ARE MARKED BY DEATH. WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO GET CONTAMINATED BY THEM.** This section deals with rules that come into effect if someone touches a dead unclean animal.

A. ONE WAY TRANSFERENCE (24-25)

Verses 24-25 remind us that transference goes only one way. A dirty thing can make a clean thing dirty, but a clean thing cannot make an unclean thing clean by touching it. For example, if I were to take a clean shirt and brush against a dirty car, my shirt gets dirty. The car doesn't become clean. If I drop a clean towel in a mud puddle, the towel becomes dirty; the mud puddle doesn't all of a sudden become clean water.

If a Hebrew touched the body of a dead unclean animal, he became ceremonially unclean. Here is what is interesting. Hebrews could touch and use unclean animals as long as they were alive. For example, a Hebrew could ride on a camel. But if the camel was dead and a Hebrew touched the body, the Hebrew would be unclean. If you think about it, this law actually protected unclean animals from abuse. An Israelite would not beat his camel to death. If he did, he would be unclean.

B. CONTAMINATION (26-31)

In verses 26-31 the contamination is described. When someone touched a dead unclean animal she became unclean. The person who came in contact with the animal, even if it was unintentional, became ceremonially unclean. The person would remain unclean until that evening at sundown. He must wash his clothes completely.

For us, there are all sorts of things that can contaminate us. When we pick up the world's ideas of what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, or good and bad, we become tainted. We must be careful to evaluate life according to God's standards as written down in the Bible.

THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD ARE MARKED BY DEATH. WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO GET CONTAMINATED BY THEM. This is especially true when it comes to our friends. We should remember that bad company corrupts good morals. I know that we like to be with the in crowd at school and at work. But we have to be careful.

III. DON'T CONTAMINATE (VS 32-40)

Since We Still Need To Live In The World, We Can't Help Interacting With And Touching The World.

Verses 32-40 remind us not to be contaminated. This sounds a lot like the last section however, we should add this. **SINCE WE STILL NEED TO LIVE IN THE WORLD, WE CAN'T HELP INTERACTING WITH AND TOUCHING THE WORLD.** Jesus didn't take us out of the world. We still need to go to school, go to work, and interact with the world every day. We must be careful not to let it contaminate our thoughts, our words, our attitudes, or our behavior. For the Hebrews, there were even laws about these dead animals touching their food and water supply.

A. WATER (32-36)

Verses 32-36 talk about water. If a dead unclean animal fell into a water jar, or cooking pot, whatever was in the pot had to be thrown out. The pot or container had to be destroyed as well. That's pretty significant. Food and water were always precious. People had to take great care to insure dead animals or insects didn't fall in them. But look at the exceptions in verse 36. If a dead animal fell into a body of water, it did not contaminate the water supply. This leads me to believe that God made these laws as tests of obedience. A dead fly in a jar of water would contaminate the water and the jar. But there would be no water to drink if every body of water became unclean by a dead unclean animal fell into it. For example, unclean fish would die in the lake every day, yet they did not contaminate the lake.

B. SEED (37-38)

The rules pertaining to seed in verses 37-38 are also interesting. If one of these dead animals falls on dry seed, the seed remains clean. However, if the seed has been pre-moistened for planting, and a dead animal falls on it, it is unclean.

It would be very tempting for a Hebrew, especially if no one was looking to just flick the fly out of the water or the pot of food and eat and drink it. He may reason that food and water are valuable. No one saw it, so it didn't matter. The farmer who prepped the seed for planting may reason that since no one was looking and he worked hard to prep the seed, he would just go ahead and plant it.

C. PEOPLE (39-40)

The wrong thinking here is that God sees and this obedience was a test of their faith and love for God. Verses 39-40 remind us that when we come into contact with things that are unclean, they affect us. These days, I'm starting to look at all of life as an opportunity to demonstrate my love for God. I live in the world, but I'm trying to focus more and more on what God has for me to do. We can't escape. We live in this world that is under the power and control of Satan. We must be focused and on guard. **SINCE WE STILL NEED TO LIVE IN THE WORLD, WE CAN'T HELP INTERACTING WITH AND TOUCHING THE WORLD.**

IV. DON'T DISOBEY (VS 41-47)

We Must Remember That God Expects Us To Obey.

It's important that we remember this because verses 41-47 remind us not to disobey. **WE MUST REMEMBER THAT GOD EXPECTS US TO OBEY.** We all have our reasons for not completely obeying God. We have all sorts of excuses. Look it really doesn't matter if I understand the "why" of what God commands. I am simply to obey.

A. ONE LAST REMINDER (41-45)

In verses 41-45, God gives them one last reminder. God reinforces the fact that the Hebrews are not to eat any creepy crawly creatures. They are unclean. For us, God has commanded us to morally and sexually pure. The world is right here telling us that lying a little or cheating a little is o.k. The world is telling us that acting out sexually is o.k.

Our friends, even our schools, and sometimes even parents are telling us it's o.k. to fudge a little on things. But nothing could be further from the truth and more disastrous.

B. ONE LAST WARNING (46-47)

In verses 46-47 God gives them one last warning. Here is the gist of what He says. "I am Jehovah. I am the God Who brought you out of slavery in Egypt, set you free, and made you into a nation. I did this for the purpose of becoming Your God. Do not defile yourselves. Do not make yourselves unclean because I live among you. Since you are my people and since I live in your midst, and since I am holy, you too must be holy."

Jesus suffered, died, and rose again, in order to set us free from our bondage from sin, Satan, fear, and death. He gave us new life. And further, He lives in us through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. He said that the way in which we demonstrate our love for Him is to obey Him. Do you realize that God lives in us? **WE MUST REMEMBER THAT GOD EXPECTS US TO OBEY.**

V. EPILOGUE

It took effort for the Hebrews to remain clean, to pursue holiness, and to obey God. It takes effort, planning, and hard work for us to pursue holiness through obedience as well. The point is this. **GOD'S PART IN OUR HOLINESS IS TO APPLY THE BLOOD OF JESUS TO OUR LIVES. OUR PART IN HOLINESS IS SIMPLY TO OBEY.**

The Hebrews were constantly reminded to be holy since the Tabernacle was in the center of their camp and the pillar of cloud and fire was visibly present. God is even more intimately present with us. He lives in us. We would do well to remember that.

I don't know who wrote this story but I think it ought to reflect our attitude:

"When Queen Victoria reigned in England, she would occasionally visit some of the humble cottages of her subjects. One time she entered the home of a widow and stayed to enjoy a brief period of Christian fellowship. Later on, the poor woman was taunted by her worldly neighbors. 'Granny,' they said, 'who's the most honored guest you've ever entertained in your home?' They expected her to say it was Jesus, for despite their constant ridicule of her Christian witness, they recognized her deep spirituality. But to their surprise she answered, 'The most honored guest I've entertained is Her Majesty, the queen.' 'Did you say the queen? Ah, we caught you this time! How about this Jesus you're always talking about? Isn't he your most honored guest?' Her answer was definite and scriptural: 'No, indeed! He's not a guest. He lives here!' Her hecklers were put to silence."

I think if we continue to focus our attention on the fact that Jesus lives in us, we will be much more determined to pursue holy living.