

Clean and Unclean

Peace and Communion · Leviticus 11; Acts 10

H. H. Snell

Ye shall be holy; for I am holy (Lev. 11:44).

I am holy is God's own declaration of Himself. When therefore He is pleased in addressing His people to connect with it, Ye shall be holy,

it is clear that communion can only be maintained between the Father and His children on principles which are in accordance with His own mind. While communion therefore is the highest privilege that can be known on earth, yet it must be according to the holiness of Him who says, Be ye holy; for I am holy {1 Pet. 1:16}.

May our souls be more sensible of the holiness of the fellowship which is of the Spirit! In order to progress in the things of God, even when under the influence of divine truth, two things seem necessary; first, a moral condition of soul to be capable of reception; and secondly, an exercised state of mind. With the Corinthian believers, the former was so much wanting, that the apostle was unable to set before them the deep things of God. They were "carnal," and "babes," so that he could only feed them with milk, and not with meat. The Ephesian saints, however, were in a very different state, so that the apostle could happily set before them the eternal counsels, ways, and mysteries of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he was obliged to withhold from the Corinthians. The epistle to the Hebrews furnishes us with an instance of the latter requirement. The apostle evidently desired to teach them many precious things about the Melchisedec priesthood of Christ, but they had been so unexercised by divine truth that they were dull of hearing. He said, Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:11-14).

It is clear therefore that exercise of mind by the truth of God is indispensable to our making spiritual progress, or to giving us competency to distinguish between good and evil. It can easily be seen how both these points bear on the line of truth now before us. In pondering the solemn and yet precious subject of communion as set forth in Holy Scripture, we shall find that there are two branches which arrest us on the very threshold; first, the ways and walk which suit our Father in this holy occupation; and secondly, the way of restoration when communion has been broken. Scripture abounds with instruction on both these topics. As an example of the first we

may direct attention to the eleventh chapter of Leviticus. It need scarcely be said that the various details of this chapter literally applied to the children of Israel. God having separated them as a people in the flesh unto Himself, them and their offspring, from every other nation on earth, redeemed them out of Egypt, and dwelt among them; He, with other manifestations of His care, prescribed what they should eat, and commanded that certain things should not be eaten, nor even touched, but had in abomination. No doubt as articles of food God selected the best for them. But the conclusion of the chapter points to deeper lines of instruction than are apparent in the beginning. We do well to remember the teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews, that these ceremonials were of a carnal order, and only for the time, during the standing of the unrent veil. By the tabernacle service we are told that the Holy Ghost was thus signifying that the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest. We therefore read of both gifts and sacrifices, which could not make the worshiper perfect as pertaining to the conscience; also of meats and drinks, and divers washings and fleshly ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation, or of setting things right. With landmarks so clearly laid down, we can profitably ponder this and similar chapters, as the Holy Ghost may graciously guide and teach. In these days, when men's minds are so active in raising questions about almost everything, not a few have said a great deal about what should be eaten, and what should not be eaten. But concerning this we have the clearest instruction in the New Testament. The Christian, on the one hand, is told that every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer (1 Tim. 4:4, 5).

On the other hand, things strangled

and blood {Acts 15:20}

are as much prohibited now as ever. Before the deluge God gave men the herb of the field (Gen. 3:18)

for food; but after the deluge, and when the Lord smelled a sweet savor, or a savor of rest, in the clean beasts that had been sacrificed, and blessed Noah and his sons, He said, Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat (Gen. 8:20 to 9:4).

Thus blood was prohibited by God in the days of Noah; and man, whether Jew or Gentile, infidel or Christian, has never from that time had liberty from God to eat blood. To believers in Christ who are brought into the liberty of children of God,

it has been written by the apostles: It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well (Acts 15:28, 29).

From this Scripture it is clear, that, however literally this chapter in Leviticus called for an observance on the part of the children of Israel in daily food, to us it can have no such meaning; for the only prohibitions we have are "from things strangled," and "from blood." That there are, however,

deeply precious lessons now to be gathered by the spiritual from this chapter in Leviticus, and similar portions of the word, is obvious enough; for whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

And again, All these things happened unto them for ensamples [types]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Cor. 10:11).

Moreover, inasmuch as Moses wrote of Christ, who is the great object of testimony in the ancient Scriptures, there must be found therein much instruction for us on the subject of communion; for in what could the Father have communion with us, unless it were concerning His beloved Son? And do we not find precious traces of Jesus in this chapter in Leviticus? It surely is a divine treatise on “clean” as opposed to “unclean,” and is intended to teach God’s redeemed people lessons on holiness, and to make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten, and the beast that may not be eaten (Lev. 11:47).

Can we ever think of clean as contrasted with unclean without being reminded of Him who was the holy, spotless Lamb of God? We eat naturally to satisfy the cravings of appetite. By receiving and digesting food it becomes incorporated with our bodies, and forms a part of ourselves. We refuse certain things because of their uncleanness and unsuitability, and eat what we relish, and what we judge good for ourselves. Others do the same. When we eat of the same food with others, we have communion; we partake together of the same meat. By eating then in a spiritual sense we understand communion. Our fellowship being with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, we are occupied with such things as suit this fellowship. The Father loveth the Son, and we love the Son. In Him the Father’s joy and rest unceasingly abide; in Him also we, in our measure, have joy and rest. What is “clean” therefore in Scripture, looking at it spiritually, must set forth Christ; and what is “unclean” must be unlike this perfect model, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. In this chapter we are led by the Spirit of God to learn lessons from the animal creation. We are first instructed by

what we find in beasts, then in fishes, then in birds, and, lastly, in creeping things. We know that when Jesus takes His rightful place as Son of man, and when creation, now groaning, is delivered from the bondage of corruption, things will be in a very different state from what they are now. Then it will be said of Him, Thou madest Him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under His feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea (Psa. 8:6-8).

Then, too, the vision of the writer of the Revelation will be realized, concerning which he said: And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever (Rev. 5:13).

Blessed, however, as it is thus to contemplate the future deliverance of these creatures, it is good to be led by the Spirit of God to look at them now in their present groaning state, while Satan is the prince of this world, and to learn practical lessons of holiness as we become acquainted with God’s mind, and

mark the difference between clean and unclean. With regard to “beasts,” Moses is thus instructed to speak to the redeemed people among whom Jehovah dwelt: Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that shall ye eat. Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you. And the coney, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you. And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you. And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven-footed, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean unto you. Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch: they are unclean to you (Lev. 11:2-8).

They were thus directed to distinguish between clean and unclean, so as to feed on some and to refuse others, not even to touch them, but in the most decided way to hold that they are unclean.

The clean, as we have observed, shadow forth Christ. They were marked by two distinguishing features -- parting the hoof and chewing the cud. When an animal was found bearing both these characteristics it was clean, and might be eaten; but if only one of these qualities existed in the beast, no matter however prepossessing it might otherwise seem, it must be entirely rejected. Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you (Lev. 11:8).

The “divided hoof” is clearly suggestive of walk, and “chewing the cud” of meditation on the word of God. Both these were strikingly and perfectly set forth in Jesus the Son of God, whose fellowship with God knew not a moment’s

interruption until He was made sin and a sacrifice for us on the cross. We know that He walked not after the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. His delight was in the law of Jehovah, and in His law did He meditate day and night (Psa. 1:1, 2; Heb. 7:28). From these clean beasts then we are instructed not only to gather up spiritual food, but to go over it, portion by portion, in meditation, that it may be effectual for present comfort and strength in the walk. The importance of meditation on the Word can scarcely be over-estimated. It is more than reading, and one of the essentials of communion. By thus being occupied with the Scriptures, in dependence on the Holy Ghost and in faith, we receive God’s thoughts into the mind and heart, and are thus guided and strengthened to walk for His glory. In all this Jesus was our perfect model. Meditating in the law of Jehovah day and night, He did always those things which pleased Him. Obedience was His constant employ. He said, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work {John 4:34}.

He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross {Phil. 2:8}.

These ways are clean and pure. Those who are born of God easily understand them. But there are unclean things to be rejected. There are spurious imitations of Christianity which the faithful are not to touch, not to be mixed up with the uncleanness of what is false, though it may to an unexercised soul seem to be genuine. The counterfeit in both the examples before us consists in separating what God has

joined together -receiving His word, and walking like Christ. There are some who loudly cry up works. They contend for a righteous, conscientious walk. Their constant cry is, "Give and do." Practicing self-denial, and showing benevolence to our fellow-creatures, benefitting society, and improving the world, are the chief points they enforce. Philanthropy is their watchword. These are the Pharisees of modern times, and, like them, are hoping to have forgiveness of sins, if they need it, when they come to die. Though something like the clean animal in the one point of having a divided hoof, and leaving a certain track in the walk, yet they are as unclean as the swine, because they chew not the cud. The testimony of God as to man's utter ruin as a sinner, and of eternal redemption accomplished by Christ Jesus for all who believe in His name, as the foundation of all true Christianity, is ignored by them. Their principles are unclean, and those who are under their influence, whatever their apparent usefulness, are swine and not sheep: The swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you (Lev. 11:7).

There is another form of spurious Christianity equally unclean which also has many admirers. It cries up loudly the value of the Scriptures. Bible knowledge is inculcated. The precious volume is largely distributed. Christianity, as a system which is opposed to Judaism, Mohammedanism, and idolatry, is openly contended for. Bible-classes are formed; Biblical

literature is upheld as a necessary branch of education; but there is nothing vital for souls. The Word is not delighted in and received into the heart as giving eternal life now; and the certain knowledge of forgiveness of sins through faith in the Son of God is unknown. The consequence is, that with all this standing up for the Bible there is not the walk of faith, because there is not the life of faith upon the Son of God; though chewing the cud, there is not the divided hoof. Doctrines are merely held in the head without power on the heart and walk. This brings reproach on the truth, because it practically declares that a man can be a Christian and yet follow the pleasures of sin, as their attendance at theaters, concerts, the race-course, the hunting-field, the ball-room show, as well as the habit of spending their strength and time in the frivolous pastimes and idle amusements of modern society. Like the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you (Lev. 11:4).

When the word of God in the love of it is received into the heart, the blood of Christ known as having purged the conscience, and the soul brought thus into the holy presence of God in perfect peace, we surely have no difficulty in concluding that henceforth we should live not to ourselves; but unto Him who died for us, and rose again (2 Cor. 5:15). May we love the word of God, esteem it better than thousands of gold and silver, and more than our necessary meat. May we so receive the Word from the mouth of God, that, like one of old, we may be able to say, Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart (Jer. 15:16).

Then it will search us; for it divides between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; then, in the sweet consciousness that we are children of God, we shall be constrained to receive the apostle Peter's injunction to walk as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1

Pet. 1:14-16).

As to fishes, there were two things which, when found together, marked that which was “clean” -- having fins, and also scales; all others were unclean. These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you: they shall be even an abomination unto you; ye shall not eat of their flesh, but ye shall have their carcases in abomination. Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that shall be an abomination unto you (Lev. 11:9-12).

“Fins” show that the creature has power to go down, or rise high, or to swim against the stream; and the scales so completely enveloping them illustrate the covering or armor which the true servants of God have. We know how invulnerable Jesus was to every fiery dart of Satan. He could

truly say, The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me {John 14:30}.

In the perfectness of faith, He who took upon Him the form of a servant, effectually resisted every temptation with, It is written {Matt. 4:4, 7-10; Luke 4:4-8};

and every child of God, through grace, in Christ his righteousness has strength to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one, and to escape his wiles. Our strength being in Another, and not in ourselves, we are enjoined to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might,

and thus to put on the whole armor of God {Eph. 6:10, 11}.

Being born of God, and also having the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, we are able to go against the tide of circumstances; to refuse the world’s patronage and honors; to go down, if need be, to the place of self-abasement, or to rise higher and higher in the power of faith. Nothing is commoner in Christendom than to find persons pleading circumstances, and other influences, in excuse for disobedience to the word of the Lord. What many really mean by the guidance of providence is often only the opening up of circumstances, irrespective of the mind of God. But the principle is “unclean.” A dead fish is carried down the stream, and only turns according to the windings of the river. Not so the way of faith. It looks only to the Lord. It finds direction in His word. And though it be against the influence of dearest friends, and calls for the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye, faith still goes forward; and though experiencing loss, and opposition of various kinds, follows the instructions of the word of God. Faith echoes the precious words of the Master, when in His unutterable agony, Not as I will, but as Thou wilt {Matt. 26:39}.

A fish that has “no fins” finds its pleasure in burrowing in the mud, and its element in that which is unclean, being directed only by the current of circumstances; and a fish having “no scales,” is, from its nakedness, exposed to every surrounding influence. Like many professors of Christianity, who not only find themselves at home in the world, its commerce, politics, pleasures, or religiousness, and make no stand for Christ’s name and honor, nor rise up against the stream of scepticism, and infidelity, which threaten to carry everything before them. Alas! what must be the eternal doom of such professors, who,

like one of old, betrayed the Lord with a kiss for a few pieces of silver! God be praised for opening our eyes to distinguish between clean and unclean; between what suits the holiness of God our Father, and what only accords with the unholy tastes of the fleshly mind! There is a busy and persevering attempt in Christendom to hold the most profound truths of Scripture with a worldly walk and conversation. Such opposite elements, however, never can be reconciled. The Holy Spirit which indwells the child of God never can be otherwise than grieved at that which is contrary to divine truth; He cannot, therefore, comfort such, or give them the happiness of soul as if nothing were amiss, for He is holy. He gives us power by strengthening us with might in the

inner man to deny self, to resist the devil, and to refuse the fellowship of unbelievers; so that, like fish with “fins,” if need be, we can go against the current of circumstances. He also takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us, and so enables us to enter into the Father’s love, and the present place and relationship He has given us in Christ, that, like fish with “scales,” influences around produce little effect. Is it any wonder, then, that the testimony of the Scripture concerning fish which have no fins nor scales {Lev. 11:12}

should be, They shall be an abomination unto you; ye shall have their carcases in abomination. Whatsoever hath no fins nor scales in the waters, that shall be an abomination unto you (Lev. 11:11, 12)?

How plain and yet decided is the truth! How clear the instruction appears when we see its spiritual signification! What can be more opposed to God than the outward profession of the name of Christ, with the heart insubject to His will, and unattracted to Himself. In these lines of typical import, what a place the word of God has. It enjoins us to be taken up with Him who has left us an example that we should follow His steps; and to own the operations and teaching of the Holy Ghost, as the power of fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. How these views we have had of clean and unclean beasts and fish seem to ask us, Does the word of Christ dwell in you richly? Do you meditate on it day and night? Are you, therefore, aiming to walk as He walked? Are you apprehending and enjoying your new creation in Christ? And are you conscious of a power (not your own) which enables you to go forward in obedience to the will of God, spite of all opposing circumstances? May we lay these things to heart, and hearken to what the Spirit saith!