

Defilement From Contact

Peace and Communion · Numbers 19

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To make a difference between the unclean and the clean (Lev. 11:47). It may be often observed in Scripture, that God directs us to the study of living creatures, in order that we may learn lessons suited to us as His children while on earth. In the chapter before us, the subject is the difference between clean and unclean,

so that we may be instructed about the ways of faith and fellowship, to which, through grace; we have been called. In other parts of Scripture, the strength, the sagacity, or the forethought of several creatures, without reference to their being clean or unclean, are found also to minister instruction to us under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The Lord Himself is spoken of as a Lion -the Lion of the tribe of Juda {Rev. 5:5}

-- because of His almighty power; for the lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away from any (Prov. 30:30).

He is also spoken of as a Lamb -the Lamb of God {John 1:29, 36}

-- because of His gentleness, meekness, spotlessness, and fitness for sacrifice. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7).

We are directed to the serpent as an example of wisdom, though in itself unclean and cursed above all cattle -- Be wise as serpents (Matt. 10:16);

and to the dove for harmlessness -- be harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16)

The conies are brought before us, to admonish us, when most conscious of our own feebleness, to place all our confidence, and find all our strength, in the Rock -- Christ Jesus. The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks (Prov. 30:26).

From insignificant creatures like "the ants," we may learn to avail ourselves of opportunities for gathering means of blessing, notwithstanding our many infirmities -The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer (Prov. 30:25).

To encourage us in the importance of Christian fellowship, and during the time too of our Lord's absence, when we have no visible head, we are enjoined to consider the locusts; for though they are individually small, yet, by combining their united energies, they accomplish wonderful and extensive results. The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands (Prov. 30:27).

From the unclean spider we may also gather instruction. We are told, The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in king's palaces (Prov. 30:28).

Unclean as we were as sinners of the Gentiles, yet having laid hold of eternal life in Christ, we shall be in the Father's house. Poor and insignificant as we are, yet a persevering diligence in God's ways, according to His truth and Spirit, will certainly lead to the honor that cometh from God only -Them that honour Me, I will honour {1 Sam. 2:30};

and, The soul of the diligent shall be made fat {Prov. 13:4}.

And further. In the wonderful work committed to the apostle Peter, of opening the door of faith to the Gentiles, we are told that he was divinely qualified for it by a vision of wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. Up to that time he seems to have attached merely a literal interpretation to this eleventh chapter of Leviticus, and such like Scriptures; for when he saw the vision, and heard the voice, Rise, Peter; kill and eat,

he replied, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean {Acts 10:13, 14}.

But now, under the direct teaching of God, he finds these beasts, and birds, and creeping things to be representative of men utterly unclean in themselves, but, through divine grace, capable of being cleansed by the precious blood of Jesus. So this great apostle, who had the keys (not of the Church, for it has no keys, but) of the kingdom, evidently understood the vision. Peter's own account is, I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven (Acts 11:5-10).

We are further told, that While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them (Acts 10:19, 20).

Nothing can be clearer than the spiritual instruction which God would have us gather from this deeply interesting chapter in Leviticus, and that these animals set forth the unclean workings of men in the flesh. But how blessed to know that though their uncleanness is unsuited to the presence of God, or the company of His people, yet that sinners of the Gentiles are not too unclean for the blood of Christ to cleanse and make fit for God's most holy presence.

In our meditations on the former part of this chapter, we have been seeking to derive profit from considering clean and unclean beasts, as well as from clean and unclean fishes. Fowls are next brought before us. Here, too, we have clean and unclean (cp. Deut. 14:11, 20, "Of all clean fowls ye may eat.") Again,

Thus we see, speaking generally, that clean fowls are marked by being not of the world, but heavenly in their ways, and harmless; they may be surrounded by snares, yet are they dependent on God, and joyful creatures. Clean fowls then shadow forth the perfect One, who has left us an example that we should follow His steps, and who said of us,

These may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth (Lev. 11:21).

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world (John 17:16)

The first point to notice in clean fowls is their power of rising above the earth. We know of our Lord, at a time when everything seemed to be against Him, that He rose above all earthly circumstances; At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight (Matt. 11:25, 26).

A clean fowl then leaps above the earth, is more or less heavenly in its flight. Secondly, clean fowls are harmless, and separate from that which is unclean; reminding us of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners {see Heb. 7:26}.

Thirdly, What can be more dependent on God? for they have neither storehouse nor barn. The unclean birds may turn again and again to the carcase as their store of food, not so the fowls that are clean. Fourthly, Many clean birds are joyful -- they sing and make melody; and so those who are born of God are enjoined to rejoice in the Lord alway {Phil. 4:4};

and some know what it is even in circumstances of outward suffering, to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory {1 Pet. 1:8}.

Fifthly, They are exposed to many snares. With clean fowls, then, we are at home in gathering up precious lessons in the life and walk of fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Especially we learn that believers are not of the world, for that which is of the world is not of the Father. If they have no power to leap upon the earth they are not clean. The apostle John says, They are of the world

(their resources, their enjoyments, and their home): therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us, Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error (1 John 4:5, 6).

There must be then in those who are born of God something distinct from worldliness and earthly-mindedness, though it may be in some instances very limited in degree. Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind. But all other flying creeping things, which have four feet, shall be an abomination unto you (Lev. 11:21-23).

But unclean fowls are very unlike Christ. They remarkably set forth the ways of the natural man. As the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, he must have something else on which to gratify his desires. They may be quiet occupations or noisy, moral or profane, nevertheless the quality is unclean, and is not of God; it is in some shape or other -- of the world, or of the flesh, or of Satan. The most refined natural man is without God {Eph. 2:12},

and derives his pleasure from that which is unclean in His sight, however religious it may appear to men. The man who is not born anew can never rise above self. Philanthropy is self-gratification, and man is the object; Christianity is selfabnegation, and the glory of God is its object. Unclean fowls were not to be eaten, not to be touched; even their carcasses could not be borne without uncleanness being contracted. We may, for the sake of brevity, group them into classes, though each creature has doubtless a separate line of instruction to us. 1. Some of these fowls feed upon carrion and other unclean things, and strikingly exemplify the filthiness of the flesh -- that which finds its pleasure in what is vile and corrupt. Hence, as Christians, we are enjoined to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God {2 Cor. 7:1}.

There are things not even to be once named among us, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks (Eph. 5:3, 4).

And again, Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. 4:29).

The eagle, the vulture, and such like, belong to this class. Our Lord said, Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together {Matt. 24:28}.

It is a well-known fact that when an animal dies in the desert, the flight of these unclean birds towards the dead body for food takes place with incredible rapidity. They maintain themselves, and find their pleasure in feeding on that which is filthy and corrupt. 2. We are reminded of the selfishness of man in the flesh by many of those fowls, which are birds of prey. Their own existence is kept up through others being victimized. Man's motto is, "Mind yourself." His selfishness is the manifestation of the uncleanness of his nature. Jesus was not like this; for He pleased not Himself {see Rom. 15:3}.

He went about doing good. His heart was set on blessing others. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. Practical Christianity is holiness; it is walking as He walked. Hence the teaching of the Holy Ghost is, Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:4, 5).

These birds of prey are selfish indeed. The hawk and such-like fowls pounce on small and defenseless creatures only to benefit themselves. The cuckoo drives another from the comfortable nest it has constructed, and appropriates it for its own use. Such creatures subsist on the helplessness and downfall of the weak. And how many a man makes a pedestal for himself by the ruin of others! How many fatherless and widows have been oppressed to enrich the coffers of the covetous! How few people now seem to rank covetousness with the grossest sins of immorality as Scripture does! May Jesus be our model, that blessed One who left us an example that we should follow His steps. 3. The

ungodliness and deceitfulness of the flesh are specially brought out in the night birds. Eager to devour others, they quietly obtain the objects of their voracious appetite in the stillness of the night, when least suspected. The owls and other birds secrete themselves mostly during the day, and with singular powers of nocturnal vision, when their victims are unconscious of their danger, suddenly and almost noiselessly take them in their fatal grasp. What a striking illustration of practical ungodliness and deceit! Look also at the bat. It dreads the light. Large numbers of them are found in caverns and dark recesses in Palestine. It hides itself by day in filthy and desolate places, and in the twilight of morning and evening, with soft wings enabling it to fly without noise, swiftly and rapidly devours with its sharp teeth the many insects in its way. How unlike is all this to Jesus. How unsuited it is to His followers need not be detailed. Suffice it to say that our path is to be followers [imitators] of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour (Eph. 5:1, 2).

And the grace of God teaches us thus to act; for the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men; teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:11-14).

Such is practical Christianity -- the path divinely marked out for us. The unclean principles therefore which we have been contemplating are to be wholly shunned by God's dear children. Not only are we not to eat, but not even to touch their carcases. Their carcase is to be loathsome to us; for we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret (Eph. 5:11, 12).

The unobserved and noiseless activities of the flesh are to be abhorred as much as those which are avowedly filthy and corrupt; the secret and refined ways of selfishness are to be held in abomination as much as those which are open and profane. To the Christian, Christ is the perfect model; and walking according to His mind we shall be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:15, 16).

This necessarily entails a separate path; for we are the Lord's, and the unclean are not to be touched. In this way we shall find special blessing: Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters; saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:17, 18).

Creeping things were also to be had in abomination. Every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten. Whatsoever goeth upon the belly, and whatsoever goeth upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an abomination. Ye shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creepeth, neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be

defiled thereby (Lev. 11:41-43).

Creeping things move quietly, steadily, and with apparent humility; but they for the most part burrow in the earth, and know nothing higher. Jude traces the origin of the apostasy to certain men having crept in unawares. Through the unwatchfulness of the saints they quietly and steadily pursued their purpose, and found an entrance into the assembly of God's people. Jude says, There are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

The apostle Paul also speaks of others who creep into houses and attract to themselves weak and silly women. He describes them as men who resist the truth: men of corrupt minds.

After enlarging on the ecclesiastical evil of the last days, and giving this solemn sentence, Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,

he adds, For of this sort are they which creep into houses

(noiselessly and yet perseveringly), and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:5-8).

What a solemn but striking picture is this of what is actually going on in Christendom at this moment! How truly the spiritual import of creeping things

was held in abomination by the apostles! Nothing can more clearly convey to us the need of entire separation from all such things, and not looking favorably upon them under any circumstances. If any plead that there is no harm in touching a creeping thing when dead, or if any solicit us to touch it because it has no power, we are told that it is still defiling. Whosoever doth touch them, when they be dead, shall be unclean until the even. And upon whatsoever any of them, when they are dead, doth fall, it shall be unclean (Lev. 11:31, 32).

An earthen vessel so touched must be broken, and whatsoever it contained be unclean. A fountain or pit with plenty of water, however, is clean. If the water here typify the Holy Ghost, it cannot be defiled. These, and other points of difference between clean and unclean, shew how exercised we should be before the Lord as to the things with which we are having fellowship. There are many who would refuse to eat, but do not hesitate to touch; many who reject certain doctrines and principles for themselves, yet associate harmoniously with those who hold them. Again, there are some who declare of certain principles and doctrines that they are unclean in themselves, but that they have become obsolete, and have practically died out; so that you need not hesitate now to touch the carcase of them. We need to be watchful, and continually before the Lord, lest we touch that which is unclean, and defile ourselves with any manner of creeping thing which creepeth upon the earth. We are told also, both as regards unsound doctrine and evil practice, that it spreads, and that a little is enough to set evil going. As a redeemed people, the habitation of God, and dear children of God, He says to us, Be ye holy; for I am holy {1 Pet. 1:16}.

It is well to observe, before leaving this chapter, the remedy God graciously provided for such as made themselves unclean by touching the carcasses of unclean things. On several occasions we are told he shall wash his clothes, and shall be unclean until the even {Lev. 11:25, 28}.

In every instance the instruction is to wash his clothes.

This to us is figurative of bringing our near surroundings under the cleansing action of the word of God. In it there is both the acknowledgment of defilement, and the removal of it according to God's mind. Even if a clean beast, which they might eat, died, the person who touched its carcass would be unclean till even; and he that eateth of the carcass {Lev. 11:40},

or beareth the carcass {Lev. 11:28}

of it, shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even. So we see that that which at one time was clean to us, and with which the Spirit of God would lead us into happy fellowship, might afterward become so manifestly corrupt and unclean as to call for our withdrawal, and forbid us even to touch. There is another case in the seventeenth chapter of a somewhat different character, which may well be alluded to here:

Every soul which eateth that which dieth of itself, or that which was torn with beasts, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even; then shall he be clean. But if he wash them not, nor bathe his flesh; then he shall bear his iniquity (Lev. 17:15, 16).

Here the defilement is of a more serious character, so that the person needs to be washed with water as well as his clothes, in order to be clean: if he neglected these requirements, he would come under judgment. All these instances shew the need of our having much to do with the word of God, not only to give us intelligence as to His mind, but to exercise our consciences as to our own state and surroundings, as well as to help us in selfjudgment, remove defilement, restore our souls, and to enlarge our fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. When the question is proposed in Scripture, Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?

The answer is, By taking heed thereto according to thy word (Psa. 119:9).

How helpless and dependent the child of God is while passing through this evil world; yet, through abundant mercy, he can still say -“When I am weak, then am I strong, Grace is my shield, and Christ my song.”