

Why Does God Care What I Eat?

Leviticus 11:1-47

Leviticus series #8

June 19, 2022

Presermon Remarks

- New section that deals with the body
- Food laws (11), childbirth (12), skin diseases (13-14), bodily discharges (15)

Intro: Modern Food Laws

- Friends who are: intermittent fasting, Whole 30, Dry January, Keto, Gluten Free, Vegan
 - Food laws in religion is extremely common
- Bible: 1st commandment comes with provision of food, 2nd commandment is about food
 - Food is more than just food, it's deeply spiritual!

Mark Scarlata In the industrialized, developed world we easily forget how central the act of eating is to life. We take it for granted that we can pop round the local shops and pick up something any time of day. Meat is prepared for us, vegetables are pre-washed and sliced, sandwiches are made and boxed for easy eating on the go. We don't often consider where the food has come from or what's in it. Lengthy ingredient lists are often scrawled on packages in microscopic print along with the place of origin, which may have been a country thousands of miles away. We don't know how the food has been produced, how it has been transported, how it has been processed, and, for the most part, we don't care. We've become so accustomed to knowing virtually nothing about food production that eating becomes a mindless, physical act with the end goal of simply satisfying our appetites. God, however, intended food to be something more than just physical sustenance for our bodies.

Today, I want to simply address Four Questions:

1. What are the Levitical food laws?
2. What purpose did they serve?
3. How do they point to Jesus?
4. What do I do with them today?

I. What Are the Food Laws? **Lists of animals allowed and disallowed

1. Ritual, not moral impurity | *More to come in weeks ahead*
 - a. There is nothing inherently wrong with eating certain animals
 - b. Moral impurities: there *is* something inherently wrong with adultery or theft
 - c. Ritual purity = more to do with recognition that everything in life belongs to God
2. Don't touch when dead | 11:24-25 (so obviously this includes eating)
3. Reflect creation order | Genesis 1²⁶ *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth."* | Not like modern: mammal, amphibians, etc.

Ancient Animal Categories

1. Water | 11:9-12
 - a. Fins + scales = good to go
 - b. Weird things like lobsters and eels? Nope
2. Sky | 11:13-23 (includes insects)
 - a. Mostly don't eat birds, but doves / turtle pigeons are clean
 - b. Mostly don't eat bugs, but grasshoppers/locusts are clean
3. Land | 11:2b-8
 - a. Cud + cloven hooves = good to go
 - b. Camels or hyraxes (rock badger)? Nope
4. Swarming | 11:29-30, 41-42
 - a. Just nope: lizards, mice, centipedes, snakes
 - b. Don't eat them, and if they crawl up and die, that furniture is unclean

Why this and not that? Common Explanations:

- No unhealthy animals | less consensus from modern science
- No violent animals | Maybe for birds, but camels aren't, locusts and piranhas are
- Nothing weird | All things were declared "good"

Perhaps there is an underlying logic, something that made sense in the ancient world.

Even if the rationale is unclear, the purpose is much more clear...

II. What Purpose Do They Serve?

1. Identification as God's people | Leviticus 11:44-45 ⁴⁴ For I am the Lord your God, so you must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy... ⁴⁵ For I am the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy.
 - a. Closest to "because I said so"
2. Reliance upon God | Deuteronomy 8:3 ³ He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.
 - a. Still in the desert eating manna!
3. Mastery over desires
 - a. The desire for food is the most basic of drives. And it genuinely is a **need**
 - b. That need can allow our desires to drive us. How often do our desires drive us into something sinful?
 - c. Ritual purity laws are practice, training, for the moral purity that we need

Jay Sklar As the Israelites made these distinctions between purity and impurity from a ritual perspective, they were constantly reminded that they had been set apart to be a people of purity from a moral perspective.

III. How Do They Point to Jesus?

1. Jesus fulfilled Torah perfectly
2. Jesus mastered his desires
 - a. Jesus experienced every temptation and testing
3. Jesus turned meals into mission
 - a. Training disciples, welcoming sinners, proclaiming the kingdom
4. Jesus gave his body and blood as food

True Heavenly Food

John 6 ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, ⁵⁵ because my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.”

- Jesus’ words were shocking, like the food laws are to us | **GOSPEL**

Big idea: Our deepest desires are truly satisfied in Jesus. (*Food is just an object lesson*)

IV. What Do I Do Today?

If it seems complicated, take heart! The early church wrestled with this. Significant portion of Acts and Paul’s letters are devoted to this very subject.

Gentile Inclusion

Acts 15 ²⁸ For it was the Holy Spirit’s decision—and ours—not to place further burdens on you beyond these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from food offered to idols, from blood, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. You will do well if you keep yourselves from these things.

- Gentile followers are not required to follow Levitical food law
- Jewish followers may or may not be, there are different opinions
 - Paul in Rom 14:14 *I’m persuaded that nothing is unclean in itself. But walk in love.*
- Still, **NO BLOOD** | Command to Noah in Genesis 9:4 predates Leviticus

Conclusion

Even though we’re not under this specific set of rules, our eating still matters to God

Big idea: Does your eating demonstrate satisfaction in God?

- Is there gluttony you need to address, do you practice fasting?

Big idea: Does your eating set you apart as belonging to God?

- Care for your body? Care for your neighbor? Care for the earth?

Big idea: Does your eating further the mission of God?

Scripture Reading | Leviticus 11:1-8, 44-47

Leviticus 11 ¹ The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron: ²“Tell the Israelites: You may eat all these kinds of land animals. ³You may eat any animal with divided hooves and that chews the cud. ⁴But among the ones that chew the cud or have divided hooves you are not to eat these: camels, though they chew the cud, do not have divided hooves—they are unclean for you; ⁵hyraxes, though they chew the cud, do not have hooves—they are unclean for you; ⁶hares, though they chew the cud, do not have hooves—they are unclean for you; ⁷pigs, though they have divided hooves, do not chew the cud—they are unclean for you. ⁸Do not eat any of their meat or touch their carcasses—they are unclean for you...⁴⁴ For I am the Lord your God, so you must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy. Do not defile yourselves by any swarming creature that crawls on the ground. ⁴⁵ For I am the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am holy. ⁴⁶“This is the law concerning animals, birds, all living creatures that move in the water, and all creatures that swarm on the ground, ⁴⁷ in order to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between the animals that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten.”