

The Clean and the Unclean



In the last lesson we explored the distinctions between the holy and the common, and how we should live with respect to these differences. In this lesson we will consider a similar concept but focus more on the personal aspect of how we care for our bodies.

When a manufacturing company creates a product, they nearly always have recommendations about how to get the best service from that product. They usually send a user's manual with it so the one purchasing it will know how to use and care for it. God created us and everything around us. He designed our bodies to function best under certain conditions. The Bible is like our user's manual. It gives us the information we need to get the best results in life, as we relate to those around us in society and in our personal life, our body and its functions.

The engine in a vehicle is designed to run on a certain type of fuel. It will not function properly on something it was not designed for. Our digestive system is like the engine of our body and God designed it for certain kinds of food. One of His specifications is that we eat clean food. This would mean being sure our food is not contaminated with dirt, but it also means not using the foods that the Bible calls unclean.

What kind of animals are listed in the Bible as clean? Which ones fit into this category?
Leviticus 11:3

Which animals are mentioned as examples of the unclean?
Leviticus 11:4-8

Which fish are considered clean? List some that qualify.
Leviticus 11:9

Which water creatures are unclean? What kinds fit in this category?
Leviticus 11:10-12.

Some time ago the US Navy gave advice to its sailors who got stranded at sea as to which sea creatures were safe to eat. Their recommendations matched what God gave in Leviticus 11. These are still the best principles.

Which types of birds are listed as unclean?
Leviticus 11:13-21

In these verses God does not specify which birds are clean except by giving examples of the unclean. The unclean are carnivores and scavengers. He gives examples of clean birds by which ones were approved for sacrifices (Leviticus 1:14) and which ones He personally provided for them to eat (Numbers 11:31, 32). The clean birds eat seeds.

Some people think God took away the regulations on clean and unclean meats by telling Peter to eat what he saw in his vision of the sheet let down from the sky. (Acts 10:9-16) But Peter explains what was meant by that vision. It is not about what he could eat. What did he say was the meaning of the vision?
Acts 10:28

Does God still want us to obey these health laws? What does the Bible say about God that gives us a clue?
Malachi 3:6

God also gave many rules and guidelines regarding personal hygiene and disease control. He said that certain things made a person unclean, or as we might say, he was contaminated or contagious. What were these contaminating conditions?

Leviticus 11:25, 28

Leviticus 15:2-8

Numbers 5:1-4

What did God instruct regarding sanitation?
Deuteronomy 23:12, 13

Over one hundred years ago there was a chief of a village in British Guiana (now Guyana) who asked for help from the Great Spirit, not knowing anything about the God of Heaven. An angel appeared to him and told him about the worship of the true God in heaven. He was told by the angel to have his people wash themselves and clean their homes and village, to get rid of their pigs and eat only clean meats, and to worship on the same day as the Bible says, though they did not have a Bible or know anything about it. All of these guidelines were given them by the angel that was appearing to the chief. They did these things and when the missionaries finally came years later, they found this tribe already serving the true God, singing Christian songs, and worshipping Him the way the Bible says.³⁰

When the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) ravaged Europe in the 14th century, the entire Kingdom of Poland was spared. One explanation for this is the following:

Another explanation regarding Poland is that it had a lot of Jews, particularly in urban settings; now, why were Jews less affected?

And even if Jews died at a lesser rate, it can be attributed to the sanitary practices of Jewish law.

For instance, Jewish law compels one to wash his or her hands many times throughout the day. In the general medieval world a person could go half his or her life without ever washing his hands. According to Jewish law, one could not eat food without washing one's hands, leaving the bathroom and after any sort of intimate human contact. At least once a week, a Jew bathed for the Sabbath. Furthermore, Jewish law prevents the Jew from reciting blessings and saying prayers by an open pit at latrines and at places with a foul odor. The sanitary conditions in the Jewish neighborhood, primitive as it may be by today's standards, was always far superior to the general sanitary conditions.

Jewish law also prescribes certain sanitary conditions related to burial of the dead. Leaving corpses unburied not only abetted the conditions that spread the bubonic plague but typhus and other diseases as well. The Jews, on the other hand, had a unique sense of community that not only led them to feel a responsibility to attend to the sick and dying, but caused them to always maintain a formal burial society (*chevrah kadisha*), whose responsibility it was to make sure that any Jew who died was treated according to Jewish law, including washing the body before it was buried.

These are only a few examples how Jewish law preserved the Jewish people through this terrible dark period of plague. It imposed a sanitary standard on the Jew far above the ordinary sanitary standard that medieval Europe had.³¹

Believers should be taught that even though they may be poor, they need not be uncleanly or untidy in their persons or in their homes. Help must be given in this line to those who seem to have no sense of the meaning and importance of cleanliness. They are to be taught that those who are to represent the high and holy God must keep their souls pure and clean, and that this purity must extend to their dress, and to everything in the home, so that the ministering angels will have evidence that the truth has wrought a change in the life, purifying the soul and refining the tastes. Those who, after receiving the truth, make no change in word or deportment, in dress or surroundings, are living to themselves, not to Christ. They have not been created anew in Christ Jesus unto purification and holiness.³²

The children of Israel were in no case to allow any impurities to remain upon their clothing or upon themselves. Those who had any personal uncleanness were to be shut out of the camp until the evening, and then were required to cleanse themselves and their clothing before they could return. They were also commanded to carry all their refuse to a great distance from the camp. And this was a sanitary measure, as well as a religious regulation. The Lord requires no less of his people now than he did anciently. A neglect of cleanliness will induce disease. Sickness does not come without a cause. Violent epidemics of fevers have occurred in villages and cities that were considered perfectly healthful, and these have resulted in death or broken constitutions. In many instances the premises of the very ones who fell victims to these epidemics, contained the agents of destruction which sent forth deadly poison into the atmosphere, to be inhaled by the family and the neighborhood. It is astonishing to witness the prevailing ignorance relative to the effects which slackness and recklessness produce upon health.³³

Will you choose to honor God by taking care of your body according to the guidelines He, as your Creator, has given?