

NOTES
ON
THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

by

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"Things new and old."

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by

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Leviticus 11

The Book of Leviticus may be termed "*the priest's guide book*." This is very much its character. It is full of principles for the guidance of such as desire to live in the enjoyment of priestly nearness to GOD. Had Israel gone on with the Lord, according to the grace in which He had brought them up, out of the land of Egypt, they should have been to Him "**a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**" (Exodus 19:6). This, however, they failed to do. They put themselves at a distance. They got under law and failed to keep it. Hence, the Lord had to take up a certain tribe, and from that tribe a certain family, and from that family a certain man, and to him and to his house, was granted the high privilege of drawing nigh, as priests unto GOD.

Now, the privileges of such a position were immense; but it had its heavy responsibilities, likewise. There would be the ever-recurring demand for the exercise of a discerning mind. "**The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts**" (Malachi 2:7).

The priest was not only to bear the judgment of the congregation, before the Lord, but also to expound the ordinances of the Lord to the congregation. He was to be the ever-ready medium of communication between the Lord and the assembly. He was not merely to know the mind of GOD, for himself, but be able also to interpret that mind to the people. All this would demand, of necessity, constant watching, constant waiting, constant hanging over the page of inspiration, that he might drink in, to his very soul, all the precepts, the judgments, the statutes, the laws, the commandments, and the ordinances of the GOD of Israel, so as to be able to instruct the

congregation, in reference to "**those things which ought to be done.**"

There was no room left for the play of fancy, the working of imagination, the introduction of man's plausible inferences, or the cunning devices of human expediency. Everything was laid down, with the divine precision and commanding authority of a "**thus saith the Lord.**" Minute and elaborate as was the detail of sacrifices, rites, and ceremonies, nothing was left for man's brain to originate. He was not even permitted to decide upon the kind of sacrifice to be offered, upon any given occasion; nor yet as to the mode in which such sacrifice was to be presented. The Lord took care of everything. Neither the congregation nor the priest had any authority whatsoever, to decree, enact, or suggest so much as a single item throughout all the vast array of ordinances in the Mosaic economy. The Word of the Lord settled all. Man had only to obey.

This, to an obedient heart, was nothing short of an unspeakable mercy.

It is quite impossible to overestimate the privilege of being permitted to betake oneself to the oracles of GOD, and there find the most ample, guidance as to all the details of one's faith and service, day by day. All that we need is a broken will, a mortified mind, a single eye. The divine guide book is as full as we can possibly desire. We want no more. To imagine, for a moment, that ought is left for man's wisdom to supply, must be regarded as a flagrant insult offered to the sacred canon.

No one can read the Book of Leviticus, and not be struck with the extraordinary painstaking, on the part of Israel's GOD, to furnish His people with the most minute instruction upon every point connected with His service and worship. The most cursory reader of the book might, at least, bear away with him this touching and interesting lesson.

And, truly, if ever there was a time when this self-same lesson needed to be read out in the ears of the professing church, this is the time. On all hands, the divine sufficiency of Holy Scripture is called in question; In some cases this is openly and deliberately done; in others it is, with less frankness, hinted, insinuated, implied, and inferred. The Christian mariner is told, directly, or indirectly, that the divine chart is insufficient for all the intricate details of his voyage that such changes have taken place in the ocean of life, since that chart was made, that, in many cases, it is entirely deficient for the purposes of modern navigation. He is told that the currents, tides, coasts, strands, and shores of that ocean are quite different, now, from what they were from centuries ago, and that, as a necessary consequence, he must have recourse to the aids which modern navigation supplies, in order to make up for the deficiencies in the old chart, which is, as a matter of course, admitted to have been perfect at the time it was made.

Now, I earnestly desire that the Christian reader should be able, with clearness and decision, to meet this grievous dishonour done to the precious volume of inspiration, every line of which comes to him fresh from his Father's bosom, through the pen of GOD the Holy Ghost. I desire that he should meet it, whether it comes before him in the shape of a bold and blasphemous statement, or a learned and plausible inference. Whatever garb it wears, it owes its origin to the enemy of CHRIST, the enemy of the Bible, the enemy of the soul.

If, indeed, the Word of GOD be not sufficient, then where are we? or whither shall we turn? To whom shall we betake ourselves for aid, if our Father's book be, in any respect, defective? GOD

says **"that the man of God may,"** through this book can **"thoroughly furnished unto all good works"** (II Timothy 3:17).

Man says, no; there are many things about which the Bible is silent, which, nevertheless, we need to know. Whom am I to believe? GOD or man? Our reply to any one who questions the divine sufficiency of Scripture, is just this, "either you are not a **'man of God,'** or else that for which you want a warrant is not **'a good work,'** " This is plain. No one can possibly think otherwise, with his eye resting on II Timothy 3:17.

Oh! for a deeper sense of the fullness, majesty, and authority of the Word of GOD!

We very much need to be braced up on this point. We want such a deep, bold, vigorous, influential, and abiding sense of the supreme authority of the divine canon, and of its absolute completeness for every age, every clime, every position, every department - personal, social, and ecclesiastical, as shall enable us to withstand every attempt of the enemy to depreciate the value of that inestimable treasure. May our hearts enter more into the spirit of those words of the Psalmist, **"Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever"** (Psalm 119:160).

The foregoing train of thought is awakened by the perusal of the eleventh chapter of the Book of Leviticus. Therein we find the Lord entering, in most marvellous detail, into a description of beasts, birds, fishes, and reptiles, and furnishing His people with various marks by which they were to know what was clean and what was unclean.

We have the summing up of the entire contents of this remarkable chapter in the two closing verses.

"This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth; 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."

With regard to beasts, two things were essential to render them clean:

- they should chew the cud and
- they should divide the hoof.

"Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is cloven footed, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that shall ye eat."

Either of these marks would, of itself, have been wholly insufficient to constitute ceremonial cleanness. The two should go together. Now, while these two marks were quite sufficient for the guidance of an Israelite, as to the cleanness or uncleanness of an animal, without any reference as to why or wherefore such marks were given, or what they meant, yet is the Christian permitted to enquire into the spiritual truth wrapped up in these ceremonial enactment's.

What, then, are we to learn from those two features in a clean animal?

The chewing of the cud expresses the natural process of "inwardly digesting" that which one eats; while the divided hoof sets forth the character of one's outward walk.

There is, as we know, an intimate connection between the two, in the Christian life.

The one who feeds upon the green pastures of the Word of GOD, and inwardly digests what he takes in - the one who is enabled to combine calm meditation with prayerful study, will, without doubt, manifest that character of outward walk which is to the praise of Him who has graciously given us His Word to form our habits and govern our ways.

It is to be feared that many who read the Bible do not digest the word. The two things are widely different. One may read chapter after chapter, book after book, and not digest so much as a single line. We may read the Bible as part of a dull and profitless routine; but, through lack of the ruminating powers - the digestive organs, we derive no profit whatsoever. This should be carefully looked into.

The cattle that browse on the green may teach us a wholesome lesson.

They, first, diligently gather up the refreshing pasture, and then calmly lie down to chew the cud. Striking and beautiful picture of a Christian feeding upon and inwardly digesting the precious contents of the volume of inspiration. Would that there were more of this amongst us. Were we more accustomed to betake ourselves to the Word as the necessary pasture of our souls, we should, assuredly, be in a more vigorous and healthy condition. Let us beware of reading the Bible as a dead form - a cold duty - a piece of religious routine.

The same caution is needful in reference to the public exposition of the Word.

Let those who expound Scripture to their fellows, first feed and digest for themselves. Let them read and ruminate, in private, not merely for others, but for themselves. It is a poor thing for a man to be continually occupied in procuring food for other people, And he himself dying of starvation. Then, again, let those who attend upon the public ministry of the Word, see that they are not doing so mechanically, as by the force of mere religious habit, but with an earnest desire to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what they hear. Then will both teachers and taught be well-conditioned, the spiritual life nourished and sustained, and the true character of outward walk exhibited.

But, be it remembered, that the chewing of the cud must never be separated from the divided hoof.

If one but partially acquainted with the priest's guide book - unpracticed in the divine ceremonial, happened to see an animal chewing the cud, he might hastily pronounce him clean. This would have been a serious error. A more careful reference to the divine directory would, at once, show that he must mark the animal's walk - that he must note the impression made by each movement - that he must look for the result of the divided hoof.

"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," &c., &c (Ver. 4-6).

In like manner, the divided hoof was insufficient, if not accompanied by the chewing of the cud. **"The swine, though he divide the hoof, and be cloven footed, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you"** (Ver. 7).

In a word, then, the two things were inseparable in the case of every clean animal; and, as to the spiritual application, it is of the very last importance, in a practical point of view. The inward life and the outward walk must go together. A man may profess to love and feed upon - to study and ruminate over the Word of GOD - the pasture of the soul; but, if his footprints along the pathway of life are not such as the Word requires, he is not clean. And, on the other hand, a man may seem to walk with Pharisaic blamelessness; but if his walk be not the result of the hidden life, it is worse than worthless. There must be the divine principle within which feeds upon and digests the rich pasture of GOD's Word, else the impression of the footstep will be of no avail. The value of each depends upon its inseparable connection with the other.

We are, here, forcibly reminded of a solemn passage in the First Epistle of John, in which the apostle furnishes us with the two marks whereby we may know those that are of GOD.

"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (I John 3:10).

Here we have the two grand characteristics of the eternal life, of which all true believers are possessed, namely, "**righteousness**" and "**love**."

The outward and the inward. Both must be combined. Some professing Christians are all for love, so called; and some for righteousness. Neither can exist, in a divine way, without the other. If that which is called love exist without practical righteousness, it will, in reality, be but a lax, soft, easy-going habit of mind, which will tolerate all manner of error and evil. And, if that which is called righteousness exist without love, it will be a stern, proud, Pharisaic, self-sufficient temper of soul resting upon the miserable basis of personal reputation. But where the divine life is in energy, there will ever be the inward charity combined with genuine practical righteousness. The two elements are essential in the formation of true Christian character. There must be the love that will express itself in reference to the very feeblest development of that which is of GOD; and, at the same time, the holiness that shrinks, with intense abhorrence, from all that is of Satan.

We shall now pass on to the consideration of that which the Levitical ceremonial taught with respect to "**all that are in the waters**." Here again, we find the double mark.

"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" (Ver. 9, 10).

Two things were necessary to render a fish ceremonially clean, namely, "**fins and scales**," which, obviously, set forth a certain fitness for the sphere and element in which the creature had

to move.

But, doubtless, there was more than this. I believe it is our privilege to discern, in the natural properties with which GOD has endowed those creatures which move in the waters, certain spiritual qualities which belong to the Christian life. If a fish needs a "**fin**" to enable him to move through the waters and "**scales**" to resist the action thereof, so does the believer need that spiritual capacity which enables him to move onward through the scene with which he is surrounded, and, at the same time, to resist its influence - to prevent its penetrating - to keep it out.

These are precious qualities.

The fin and the scale are pregnant with meaning - full of practical instruction to the Christian.

They exhibit to us, in ceremonial garb, two things which we specially need, namely:

- spiritual energy to move onward through the element which surrounds us, and
- the power to preserve us from its action.

The one will not avail without the other. It is of no use to possess a capacity to get on, through the world, if we are not proof against the world's influence; and though we may seem to be able to keep the world out, yet if we have not the motive power, we are defective. The "**fins**" would not do without the "**scales**," nor the "**scales**" without the "**fins**" Both were required, to render a fish ceremonially clean; and we, in order to be properly equipped, require to be encased against the penetrating influence of an evil world; and, at the same time, to be furnished with a capacity to pass rapidly on.

The whole deportment of a Christian should declare him a pilgrim and a stranger here. "Onward" must be his motto - ever and only, onward. Let his locality and his circumstances be what they may, he is to have his eye fixed on a home beyond this perishing, passing world. He is furnished, by grace, with spiritual ability to go forward - to penetrate, energetically, through all, and carry out the earnest aspirations of his Heaven-born spirit. And, while thus vigorously pushing his way onward - while forcing his passage to the skies, he is to keep his inward man fenced round about, and fast closed up against all external influences.

Oh! for more of the onward bent, the upward tendency! For more holy fixedness of soul, and profound retirement from this vain world! We shall have reason to bless the Lord for our meditations amid the ceremonial shadows of the Book of Leviticus, if we are led, thereby, to long more intensely after those graces which, though so dimly portrayed there, are, nevertheless, so manifestly needful for us.

From verse 13 to verse 24 of our chapter, we have the law with respect to birds. All of the carnivorous kind, that is, all that fed on flesh, were unclean.

The omnivorous, or those who could eat anything, were unclean. All those which, though furnished with power to soar into the heavens, would, nevertheless, grovel upon the earth, were unclean. As to the latter class, there were some exceptional cases (ver. 21, 22); but the general

rule, the fixed principle, the standing ordinance was as distinct as possible; "**all fowls that creep, going upon all fours, shall be an abomination unto you**" (Ver. 20).

All this is very simple in its instruction to us. Those fowls that could feed upon flesh; those that could swallow anything or everything; and all groveling fowls, were to be unclean to the Israel of GOD, because so pronounced by the GOD of Israel; nor can the spiritual mind have any difficulty in discerning the fitness of such an ordinance. We can not only trace in the habits of the above three classes of fowl the just ground of their being pronounced unclean; but we can also see in them the striking exhibition of that, in nature, which is to be strenuously guarded against by every true Christian.

Such an one is called to refuse everything of a carnal nature.

Moreover, he cannot feed, promiscuously, upon everything that comes before him.

- he must **"try the things that differ:"**
- he must **"take heed what he hears."**
- he must exercise a discerning mind, a spiritual judgment, a heavenly taste. Finally,
- he must use his wings.
- he must rise on the pinions of faith, and find his place in the celestial sphere to which he belongs.

In short, there must be nothing groveling, nothing promiscuous, nothing unclean, for the Christian.

As to "**creeping things**," the following was the general rule: "**And every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten**" (Ver. 41).

How wonderful to think of the condescending grace of the Lord! He could stoop to give directions about a crawling reptile. He would not leave His people at a loss as to the most trivial affair. The priest's guide book contained the most simple instructions as to everything. He desired to keep His people free from the defilement consequent upon touching, tasting, or handling ought that was unclean. They were not their own, and hence they were not to do as they pleased. They belonged to the Lord; His name was called upon them; they were identified with Him. His Word was to be their grand regulating standard, in every case. From it they were to learn the ceremonial status of beasts, birds, fishes, and creeping things. They were not to think their own thoughts, to exercise their own reasoning powers, or be guided by their own imaginations, in such matters. GOD's Word was to be their sole directory.

Other nations might eat what they pleased; but Israel enjoyed the high privilege of eating that only which was pleasing to the Lord.

Nor was it as to the mere matter of eating ought that was unclean that the people of GOD were so jealously guarded.

Bare contact was forbidden (See ver. 8, 24, 26-28, 31-41). It was impossible for a member of the Israel of GOD to touch that which was unclean without contracting defilement. This is a

principle largely unfolded, both in the law and the prophets.

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, ask ye now the priests concerning the law, saying, if one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean" (Haggai 2:11-13).

The Lord would have His people holy in all things. They were neither to eat nor touch ought that was unclean.

"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." Then follows the powerful reason for all this careful separation. "For I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Ver. 43-45).

It is well to see that the personal holiness of GOD's people - their entire separation from all manner of uncleanness, flows out of their relationship to Him.

It is not upon the principle of **"stand by thyself, I am holier than thou;"** but simply this, **"God is holy,"** and therefore all who are brought into association with Him must be holy, likewise. It is, in every way, worthy of GOD that His people should be holy.

"Thy testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh thy house, O Lord, for ever."

What else save holiness could become the house of such an One as the Lord? If any one had asked an Israelite, of old, **"Why do you shrink so from that reptile which crawls along the path?"** He would have replied, "The Lord is holy; and I belong to Him. He has said **"Touch not."** " So, also, now, if a Christian be asked why he walks apart from the ten thousand things in which the men of this world participate, his answer is simply to be, **"My Father is holy."**

This is the true foundation of personal holiness.

The more we contemplate the divine character, and enter into the power of our relationship to GOD, in CHRIST, by the energy of the Holy Ghost, the holier we must, of necessity, be. There can be no progress in the condition of holiness into which the believer is introduced; but there is, and ought to be, progress in the apprehension, experience, and practical exhibition of that holiness. These things should never be confounded. All believers are in the same condition of holiness or sanctification; but their practical measure may vary to any conceivable degree.

This is easily understood.

The condition arises out of our being brought nigh to GOD, by the Blood of the Cross; the practical measure will depend upon our keeping nigh, by the power of the Spirit. It is not a man

setting up for something superior in himself - for a greater degree of personal sanctity than is ordinarily possessed - for being, in any wise, better than his neighbours. All such pretensions are utterly contemptible, in the judgment of every right-thinking person. But then, if GOD, in His exceeding grace, stoop down to our low estate, and lift us into the holy elevation of His blessed presence, in association with CHRIST, has He not a right to prescribe what our character is to be, as thus brought nigh?

Who could think of calling in question a truth so obvious. And, further, are we not bound to aim at the maintenance of that character which He prescribes? Are we to be accused of presumption for so doing?

Was it presumption in an Israelite to refuse to touch? Nay, it would have been presumption of the most daring and dangerous character to have done so. True, he might not have been able to make an uncircumcised stranger understand or appreciate the reason of his conduct; but this was not his province.

The Lord had said, "**Touch not**," not because an Israelite was holier in himself than a stranger; but because the Lord was holy, and Israel belonged to Him. It needed the eye and the heart of a circumcised disciple of the law of GOD, in order to discern what was clean and what was not. An alien knew no difference. Thus it must ever be. It is only Wisdom's children that can justify her and approve her heavenly ways.

Ere turning from Leviticus 11, my reader might, with much spiritual profit, compare it with the tenth chapter of Acts, ver. 11-16.

How strange is must have appeared to one who had, from his earliest days, been taught in the principles of the Mosaic ritual, to see a vessel descending from Heaven, "**wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air;**" and not only to see such a vessel, so filled, but also to hear a voice, saying, "**Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.**" How wonderful. No examination of hoofs or habits!

There was no need of this. The vessel and its contents had come from Heaven. This was enough. The Jew might ensconce himself behind the narrow enclosures of the Jewish ritual, and exclaim, "**Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean;**" but, then, the tide of divine grace was rising, majestically, above all such enclosures, in order to embrace, in its mighty compass, "**all manner**" of objects, and bear them upward to Heaven, in the power and on the authority of those precious words, "**What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.**"

It mattered not what was in the vessel, if GOD had cleansed it.

The Author of the Book of Leviticus was about to raise the thoughts of His servant above the barriers which that book had erected, into all the magnificence of Heaven's grace. He would teach him that true cleanness - the cleanness which Heaven demanded, was no longer to consist in chewing the cud, dividing the hoof, or any such ceremonial marks, but in being washed in the Blood of the Lamb, which cleanseth from all sin, and renders the believer clean enough to tread the sapphire pavement of the heavenly courts.

This was a noble lesson for a Jew to learn.

It was a divine lesson, before the light of which the shadows of the old economy must pass away. The hand of sovereign grace has thrown open the door of the kingdom; but not to admit ought that is unclean. This could not be. Nothing unclean can enter Heaven. But, then, a cloven hoof was no longer to be the criterion; but "**what God hath cleansed.**"

When GOD cleanses a man, he must needs be clean.

Peter was about to be sent to open the kingdom to the Gentiles, as he had already opened it to the Jews; and his Jewish heart needed to be enlarged.

- he needed to get above the dark shadows of a by-gone age, into the meridian light that was shining from an open Heaven, in virtue of a completed sacrifice.
- he needed to get out of the narrow current of Jewish prejudices, should be borne upon the bosom of that mighty tide of grace which was about to roll through the length and breadth of a lost world.
- he had to learn, too, that the standard by which true cleanness must be regulated, was no longer carnal, ceremonial, and earthly, but spiritual, moral, and heavenly.

Assuredly, we may say, these were noble lessons for the apostle of the circumcision to learn upon the housetop of Simon the tanner. They were eminently calculated to soften, to expand, and elevate a mind which had been trained amid the contracting influences of the Jewish system. We bless the Lord for these precious lessons. We bless Him for the large and wealthy place in which He has set us, by the Blood of the Cross. We bless Him that we are no longer hemmed round about by touch not this; taste not that; handle not the other thing; but that His Lord assures us 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**" (I Timothy 4:4, 5).

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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