

The Need for a Standard

by Ray C. Stedman

Our study this morning is very appropriate to the season we are approaching, for during this holiday time if you are like me you are greatly concerned about what you are going to eat – how much and what effect it is going to have upon you. I am determined to win, if I can, the “Nobelly Prize” for abstinence this year.

This is the subject of Leviticus – God’s concern over what his people eat. It is wonderfully instructive that God was so involved with his people that he was concerned about every minute detail of their lives, even down to what they ate, what they wore, where they went, and what they did. All of this shows God’s similar concern for us at the spiritual level.

We come in Chapter 11 to a new subdivision of Leviticus. Here we see another of these basic human needs which must be met in our lives and which God meets through Christ. In our study of the five offerings which open the book we learned that we need a way to satisfy certain fundamental urges of our lives: We need love, joy, peace, forgiveness, and responsibility toward one another. All these were met in typological fashion by these offerings which point to Christ. So we learned that the way humans are to meet these needs is by a substitute, by dependence on the power of another at work. There isn’t any other way. If you are lacking in any of these areas, there is one provision for your need to be met, and only one: Jesus Christ, our great substitute. Then we learned of our need for a priest, to explain truth to us, to enlighten us, to support and comfort us, and to help us in our intellectual and emotional problems.

In this section that we come to today we face the need for a standard, a measuring stick by which we can distinguish between things which are harmful and those which are harmless, between right and

wrong and good and evil. That is not easy to do, as you well know. This section reveals the realism of Scripture. How realistically it deals with life!

Certain modern philosophies of today tell us that there is really nothing harmful, that it is only our perverted thinking which makes things wrong, and that if we would but change our thinking then anything and everything is right. The contention is that all activities and associations are fundamentally right; it is only the situation that makes any of them possibly wrong. But you don’t find anything like that in Scripture.

The Bible tells us that we are living in a world where truth and error are inextricably mixed and that you cannot easily tell one from the other – that there are snares and traps all around us. Life confirms this. People we know are constantly falling into traps before they are aware of it. Suddenly they wake up to find themselves captured. We just prayed for a young man who fell into the trap of LSD and woke up to find himself a prisoner of it. And the Bible tells us that the world is filled with the teaching of demons, with concepts and ideas which are dangerous and deadly – yet they don’t appear that way. They appear to be innocent and blithe, leading to happiness. How do you tell the difference before it is too late, before you have to learn through sorrows and sadness? Well, this is what this chapter is given to us for. It provides a marvelous way to establish guidelines and to recognize practical tests by which we can tell the difference between truth and error.

God is very concerned in the realm of what people eat. With these Israelites, his concern was expressed on the physical level – he actually regulated their diet. In this chapter, you have dietary laws distinguishing clean animals from unclean, and various sanitary practices are included as well.

It would be very wrong for us not to recognize that these dietary regulations and sanitary laws did indeed operate to preserve Israel from diseases and epidemics which were rife in the nations around them. God kept his people physically clean through many of these regulations.

Many of these practices we will be looking at here have a very commonsense basis in the maintenance of health. There is an excellent book available, called *None of These Diseases*, by Dr. S. I. McMillen. In it, he shows, in a very charming way, how many of the illnesses and ailments of our present life could be avoided if we would simply follow some of these practical, commonsense regulations which God taught his people in the Old Testament. But not all of the regulations were for that reason.

There was nothing wrong with many of the animals which were prohibited to the Israelites as food. They were prohibited only because the prohibition taught a symbolic lesson. This is brought out in the book of Acts, in the story of Peter's dream on the housetop before his visit to Cornelius in Caesarea {Acts 10:9-16}. He saw a sheet let down from heaven with all kinds of animals on it, clean and unclean, many of which Peter, in all his Jewishness, had never even considered eating! Many of these were the creeping and crawling things which were forbidden the Israelites. But, you remember, God's command was: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat," {Acts 10:13 RSV}. And Peter said, "Lord, I'm shocked at you, that you would propose that I should ever do anything unclean like this!" {cf, Acts 10:14}. God's correcting rebuke to Peter is very helpful; he said, "Peter, what God has cleansed, don't you call unclean," {cf, Acts 10:15}. Many of these animals, therefore, were perfectly all right for food, but were prohibited solely because they taught a symbolic lesson. It is this symbolism that we are interested in. What is meant by these distinctions?

A further word of introduction may be helpful. There are four spheres from which food can be taken:

1. First, there were the animals which walk on the earth – the normal and natural food of man. Yet some of them were to be considered unclean and others clean.
2. Then there were those animals which come from the sea, the seafood.

3. There was food from the heavens – the birds and winged insects.
4. Finally, there were animals which crawl or creep along in close contact with the ground.

These four divisions have a direct correspondence with something in our lives: They mark the areas from which food for our inner life can come. What the Israelites were forbidden to eat on the physical level, we are forbidden to take in on the spiritual and emotional level of our life – the inner life. There are clean and unclean ideas and concepts and spheres of knowledge which we need to distinguish today. These laws will help us greatly, because the basic principles run right through both levels of life. Let me show you what I mean.

The **first sphere** to be considered is that of the normal animals which were widely available for food to the Israelites, Verses 1-8:

And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Say to the people of Israel, These are the living things which you may eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven-footed and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat. Nevertheless among those that chew the cud or part the hoof, you shall not eat these: The camel, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. And the rock badger [really the coney, although it is not to be confused with the English rabbit – its scientific name is Hyrax Syriacus], because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you. And the hare, because it chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you." {Lev 11:1-6 RSV}

Incidentally, this verse has been the butt of a great deal of ridicule by the skeptics of the Bible who say that this shows that the Bible doesn't know anything about natural science, because rabbits and hares do not chew the cud. It is true that they don't ruminate like cows and other ruminants. But it has recently been discovered that they do have another process, somewhat similar, by which food is redigested, called *refection*. And so the Bible is right, after all. Some of us never doubted it, but those of you who did can now be at peace.

Continuing in Verse 7:

“And the swine, because it parts the hoof and is clovenfooted but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean to you.” {Lev 11:7-8 RSV}

Now, why these restrictions? Notice that those animals which were permitted had two characteristics. And they had to have both characteristics – not just one, but both. They had to chew the cud, and they had to divide the hoof. They were taken from the normal range of animal food, and so they correspond to the normal area of feeding for the believer.

What are we to feed upon? What is our normal area for taking in knowledge and insight and understanding and revelation about life? It is the Word of God, isn't it? Over and over in the Scriptures themselves we are told that the Word is our food. Jesus himself said, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” {cf, Matt 4:4}. It is likened to milk and to strong meat and to bread, and we are to feed upon this Word. But we are to feed upon only that part of it which has been tested by both these two processes which are described here in the symbols of the chewing of the cud and the dividing of the hoof.

What do these mean?

1. What is the chewing of the cud a picture of? If you have ever watched an animal that chews its cud you know that you have before you a beautiful picture of the art of meditation, of taking in knowledge and ideas and concepts, and tentatively swallowing them undigested at first, but then bringing them up again to re-think, re-chew, work over again. Thus there is proposed for us in the handling of the Scriptures a method for distinguishing between that which is wisdom from above and that which is wisdom from below, because both are in the Bible. Not everything in the Bible is true, not everything is of God, and when we feed upon it we must learn how to distinguish. The first requirement is that we must meditate, think it through.

I hope you have established this practice. Don't take these words lightly. God is saying

that you will not be able to avoid the uncleanness which can come to you through Scripture unless you adopt the practice of meditation. That is what will make the Word come alive to you. Failure to do this accounts for much of the dullness which seems to prevail for so many people in the reading of Scripture. They tend to read it through, swallow it once, and forget about it. But the richness of Scripture never really begins to appear until you chew it over again, and again.

I love to do this while I am driving around in the car. There are times when I can turn on my automatic pilot and start thinking about passages of Scripture. When you are waiting for a red light, or tied up in traffic, or on a long stretch of open road you can do this. When you are washing the dishes, or vacuuming the floor you can bring out a Scripture, and work it over and think it through. You can meditate deeply upon it and thus discover its truths, its hidden secrets. God has designed that truth is to be hidden in the Scriptures.

You remember that Paul in writing to Timothy uses several complex symbols. He says that as a good soldier you are to endure hardship. No soldier gets himself entangled in civilian affairs. An athlete will never be crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to reap the first share of the harvest. And then he says, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything,” {2 Tim 2:7 RSV}. In other words, you won't grasp that kind of truth suddenly; you must think it through. So meditation is the first process.

2. But it is not only the chewing of the cud, but also the dividing of the hoof that is important. What does that mean? That is a picture of the principle of separation, of discrimination, discernment, of the need to distinguish between that which is from above and that which is from below, to take note of the fact that the Bible reports the lies of Satan and the confused thinking of men, as well as the revelation of the mind of God.

I remember the story of two lawyers during a trial. One thought he would make a great impression on the jury by quoting from the Bi-

ble. So he said, concerning his opponent's client, "We have it on the highest authority that it has been said, 'All that a man has will he give for his skin.'" But the other lawyer knew the Bible better. He said, "I am very much impressed by the fact that my distinguished colleague here regards as the highest authority the one who said, 'All that a man has will he give for his skin.' You will find that this saying comes from the book of Job {cf, Job 2:4}, and the one who utters it is the Devil. And that is who he regards as the highest authority!"

You can't quote the Bible indiscriminately. Many cults have arisen because of the failure to understand that a division needs to be made.

The book of Ecclesiastes, for instance, has given rise to many false ideas which have been widely disseminated and said to come from the Bible – which they do. But the book begins with Solomon's warning that it is a collection of the wisdom of man, gathered from under the sun. Thus it is not to be trusted but is to be tested against the revelation of God.

So, in this area we are to feed, but we are to apply to the food we take in, even from such a wonderful source as the Word of God, this double practice of meditation and of recognizing the principle of separation.

The **next sphere** from which the Israelites were to take food was the seas, Verse 9:

"These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is an abomination to you. They shall remain an abomination to you; of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall have in abomination. Everything in the waters that has not fins and scales is an abomination to you." {Lev 11:9-12 RSV}

The sea is used throughout Scripture as a symbol of the whole body of humanity, of the world, of society. Isaiah says that the human race is "like the waves of the sea which cannot rest," filled with

many sweeping currents of thought. This encompasses the whole realm of the business world and the marketplace, of the media of television and radio and magazines and music. Most of what is available in universities and colleges is part and parcel of this knowledge of the world and its ways. From this area we are to test food, ideas and concepts, by the double process symbolized by fins and scales – not one or the other, but both.

What does this mean?

Well, fins are that which gives a fish the capacity to move, to progress, to penetrate through the waters, to employ the element through which it moves for its own progress. And scales are that which protect it against harm, which resist the effect of the element in which this food is found, which preserve it from harm from the element. So it is necessary to have both the capacity to penetrate a subject, and protection from its effects in the world, from the way the world lives.

How accurately God teaches us truth this way! As the Israelites fulfilled this on the physical level there were certain fish they couldn't eat – catfish, for instance, because catfish have fins but don't have scales. They couldn't eat shellfish – crabs and lobsters and clams and oysters. There is nothing basically wrong with these as food, but they didn't teach the lesson God wanted his people to learn, and so they were forbidden to them, though they are open to us.

The Christian is to handle the knowledge of the world in this way. He is to keep moving on all the time. He is to keep asking, "Where does this lead? Where does this idea take me?" He is to penetrate to the heart of it. He is not to be content with mere superficial knowledge of a subject but is to move right into the heart of it and to carry its implications beyond the bounds of this life, to see how they affect life in the realm of the mind and heart and spirit. But he is to resist being captured or held by any human concept. He is not to be possessed by these kinds of ideas. He is to be in the world but not of it, as the Scriptures declare {John 15:19}. He is to live as our Lord lived – right in the midst of life, right up to the hip in fellowship with those who were involved with all kinds of wrong ideas, so that he himself gained the title of winebibber and drunkard and glutton, and yet, not reflecting these ideas, not living by these practices or principles, but moving right through them, heading on to his destination.

The **third sphere** from which food could come was the heavens, Verse 13:

“And these you shall have in abomination among the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the kite, the falcon according to its kind, every raven according to its kind, the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk according to its kind, the owl, the cormorant, the ibis, the water hen, the pelican, the carrion vulture, the stork, the heron according to its kind, the hoopoe [whatever that is], and the bat.” {Lev 11:13-19 RSV}

These were all forbidden, and if you look through the list you can see why, essentially these were all either carnivorous birds, those who feed upon flesh; or carrion eaters, the vultures and buzzards; or those that are omnivorous, that eat anything and everything, the scavengers. This is instructive for us. And linked with them are other animals in the heavens – the winged insects:

“All winged insects that go upon all fours [that both fly and crawl] are an abomination to you. Yet among the winged insects that go upon all fours you may eat those which have legs above their feet, with which to leap on the earth. Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind. But all other winged insects which have four feet are an abomination to you.” {Lev 11:20-23 RSV}

When I was in the Orient I was offered some very delicious roasted grasshoppers, covered with chocolate. I managed to turn them down; but they are regarded as a great delicacy in many parts of the world. The locusts were food for John the Baptist, you remember. He ate locusts and wild honey {Matt 3:4, Mark 1:6}, for these were permitted. But almost all other insects were forbidden to the Jews. Now why? What is it about these animals which is wrong, especially as carried over to the realm of ideas and knowledge, as symbols of the food that we can take in and live by, can accept as principles by which to operate?

Well, here we have food from the heavens, and, in Scripture, the heavens are always the realm of the spirit. The peculiar function of the spirit in man is that it enables him to relate to God and to beings beyond man. That is, this is the realm of religion. Man worships because he has a spirit which gives him the capacity to worship. Food from this sphere involves the whole realm of comparative religion, the world of metaphysics, and that of the occult and witchcraft and extrasensory perception. How do we handle this? How do we test foods in this sphere?

- First we are to reject all that are obviously carnivorous, i.e. related to the flesh, carnal in nature, arising out of the principle in man of self-indulgence, out of the flesh in its self-gratifying, self-sufficient propensities.
- Then we are to reject those that are eclectic, omnivorous, which embody ideas gathered from all sources with the attempt to blend everything together. There are philosophies like this abroad today which have been concocted by selecting a little from here and a little from there and trying to put “the best” from all religions together. But that is forbidden, because it is unclean, harmful, destroying.
- Finally, those insects which can crawl and fly but are not able to leap upon the earth were to be rejected. What does this typify? Leaping is a momentary linking together of heaven and earth. The Israelites were instructed to reject anything which had contact with the earth and could fly in the heavens but was not able to leap and thus to tie the two – heaven and earth – together. Ideas which accurately, successfully tie man’s earthly life to his relationship with God may be accepted. But we are still to be careful in this area. There is much food here, but we must examine it carefully, for there is much more which is to be rejected in this area. In fact, the limits in this realm as to what is really acceptable as food are very narrowly defined.

Finally, there was that sphere in which food was in full contact with the earth, Verse 29:

“And these are unclean to you among the swarming things that swarm upon the

earth: the weasel, the mouse, the great lizard according to its kind, the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. These are unclean to you among all that swarm; whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening.” {Lev 11:29-31 RSV}

And in Verse 41:

“Every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth is an abomination; it shall not be eaten. Whatever goes on its belly, and whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet, all the swarming things that swarm upon the earth, you shall not eat; for they are an abomination. You shall not make yourselves abominable with any swarming thing that swarms; and you shall not defile yourselves with them, lest you become unclean.” {Lev 11:41-43 RSV}

Here is the whole category of that which crawls or creeps along the ground, which goes on its belly. That immediately suggests the story of the Fall in the Garden. The curse which came upon the serpent was that he would crawl on his belly for the rest of his life. This is a mark, then, of the satanic curse. In the realm of human ideas and knowledge upon which we are to feed there is no prohibition of exploration or examination. We can look into these areas and see what they are. But when we recognize knowledge that reflects a satanic view – it is a sign of the curse, and we are to go no further. We are to reject it. It is wholly of the earth and relates only to this life, to its standards, its values, its emphasis on pride and human glory, its glorification of war and hate and death. We are not to take these ideas in and accept them as principles by which to operate. Thus when we recognize them as clearly satanic we are not to delve into or even to touch these ideas. This is why Christians are forbidden to explore into the occult, which is clearly satanic from the outset, because even the exploration will defile us and render us victims of demonic forces which are dangerous to humanity.

Why does God say this? He gives us the reason in Verses 44-45:

“For I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls upon the

earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” {Lev 11:44-45 RSV}

In our introductory study in this series, we saw that this word *holy* essentially means “whole.” To be holy is to be a complete person, to fulfill your humanity. Basically, a whole person is one who performs the function for which he was originally designed. What is that, in the case of man? It is to belong to God, to be his image. It is to be the vehicle for the expression of his life. Why do we call Palestine the “holy land”? Because it belongs to God. It is his. Why do we call this book the “Holy Bible”? *Bible* merely means book. Why do we call it the holy book? Because it is God’s book, it belongs to him, it originated with him. It is his possession and he uses it for his glory. And we are to be holy, for God is holy. He is devoted to that purpose for which he himself exists: he is a Creator, and he is a Lover. God is love. And so he operates in a whole way as a whole Being, a whole Person. This is what he wants for mankind. He wants us to be whole and to fulfill our humanity.

That is why God in his love sets some limits on our lives and says, “Don’t get involved with these things. Don’t take them in. Don’t fool around with them! You will be trapped if you do. You will be defiled, your humanity will be rendered unclean and will be destroyed, and you won’t be able to fulfill all the purposes for which you have been sent into the world.” So he limits us out of love.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, writing to these Christians in a Greek city with its worship of sex and love of sensuous pleasure, Paul says to them, “The body is not for fornication...” That is contrary to much of the philosophy of our day. The body is not designed for sexual expression as its primary purpose. It doesn’t exist for that reason. “The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord,” {1 Cor 6:13 KJV}. It is for him, so that through your body and your mind, your ears and eyes and heart and hands and voice, there might come, right where you are, the manifestation of God.

That is what God is after. That is what makes you a whole human being. It is not the religious activities you go through, nor how much time you spend in Bible study that God is really interested in. He is after the expression of his character in the

midst of where you work, and in your home, and among your family and your neighbors and your friends. He desires that the character which comes through to others from you is that of love and joy and peace, and of tenderheartedness and willingness to forgive and forbearance and understanding, and of the absence of grudge-holding and bitterness and hatred and enmity. That is the character of a whole person. So God says to us, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" {1 Pet 1:16}, and avoid these things that I have warned you against, for they will but defile you. They come from the enemy."

Prayer:

How helpful, Father, are these practical injunctions to our lives, especially as we face a world which is replete with many contradictory ideas, many concepts and

practices around us which are widely accepted, even by other Christian people, and are looked upon as being innocent and wholesome and beneficial, and yet your Word says that they are not. Lord, help us to take these guidelines seriously and to begin to examine the knowledge we are taking in from magazines and books and television and every other source, and to subject it to the tests you have outlined here. Help us to be obedient to you and to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, available to you to express your life through us. Lord, we long to be whole people though we live in the midst of a broken and fragmented world. We ask you to teach us how to be such, through your word and by your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.