

What About the Gentiles?

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[0 : 00] Before we hear the preaching of God's word, let's turn in our Bibles to Acts chapter 10. Acts chapter 10. We'll be reading the first 35 verses.

At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day, at about three in the afternoon, he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God who came to him and said, Cornelius. Cornelius stared at him in fear. What is it, Lord? he asked. The angel answered, Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

Now send a man to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon, who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the Tanner, whose house is by the sea.

[1 : 03] When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

About noon, the following day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

He became hungry and wanted something to eat. And while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners.

It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.

Surely not, Lord, Peter replied. I have never eaten anything impure or unclean. The voice spoke to him a second time. Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.

[2 : 05] This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate.

They called out, asking if Simon, who was known as Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, Simon, three men are looking for you, so get up and go downstairs.

Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them. Peter went down and said to the men, I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come? The men replied, We have come from Cornelius the centurion.

He is a righteous and God-fearing man who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.

Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day, Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. The following day, he arrived in Caesarea.

[3 : 15] Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.

But Peter made him get up. Stand up, he said. I am only a man myself. Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them, You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.

But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?

Cornelius answered, Four days ago, I was in my house, praying at this hour at three in the afternoon. Suddenly, a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.

Send to Joppa for Simon, who is called Peter. He is a guest in the house of Simon the Tanner, who lives by the sea. So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

[4 : 32] Then Peter began to speak. I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

It's our privilege in the book of Acts to be watching the Lord Jesus Christ building his church. And we have noted so far that he is able to do that in the hottest persecution, and also able to do that under the times of peace that he dials up for his church, times that have their own peculiar dangers and distractions to the people of God.

And as he builds his church, he's following his own plan. The plan that he laid out for them in Acts 1.8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

So they started in Jerusalem, and they filled the city with their gospel. Many believed the number increased. And then persecution scattered them throughout Judea.

And again, people believed on the Lord Jesus and were saved and were added to the church. The same thing happened during the time of peace. More and more being joined to Christ's church.

[6 : 00] But so far, the gospel and the church has remained in Palestine. Palestine, this promised land, this area that was given to the Jews. It had not yet reached to the ends of the earth, the last phase of the Great Commission.

And not only had the gospel been confined geographically to Palestine, it had also been confined ethnically. By which I mean it had only gone to the Jews, and not to the Gentiles, the non-Jews. Now, to be sure, those previously despised Samaritans had been evangelized and brought into the church, as we've seen. But they were really half-Jews themselves, not full-fledged Gentiles.

But what about Gentiles? What about the non-Jews? That's the million-dollar question before us today. Are they included in this church that Jesus is building?

And it's not a purely theoretical question to us who are sitting here today. Rather, the answer to this question is determinative of our location forever and ever, where we Gentiles will spend eternity.

[7 : 21] Is Jesus the Savior only of the Jews, or of the Gentiles also? And can Gentiles, as Gentiles, believe and be saved and be added to the church?

Or must they become Jews first in order to then become Christians and be joined to the church?

Now, as simple as that question seems to us, and probably the kindergarten class here this morning could answer it, of course the Gentiles are included.

We're in! Let me assure you it was no easy question for the early church of Jesus Christ. It was a huge problem that kept cropping up.

It was a hurdle that stood before the church and their mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. This is something that's got to be settled. Settle clearly for the whole church to understand.

So what about the Gentiles? Well, that's the issue. Now to be cleared up in the conversion of Cornelius and his household in Acts chapter 10. The inclusion of full-fledged Gentiles in the people of God was a radical change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

[8 : 37] In the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, God had chosen one nation, Israel, out of all the nations of the world to be his covenant people.

You will be my people and I will be your God. He said that to no other nation, no other people but Israel. Now if individual Gentiles wanted to join themselves to the people of Israel, they could do that.

The men by way of circumcision, and the men and the women by submitting to all the laws, the ceremonial laws included, of the Jewish nation.

So in essence, if a Gentile wanted to belong to the people of God, in the Old Covenant, he had to become a Jew. He had to become a Jew in order to belong to God's people.

And sometimes that happens. You remember the Moabitess Ruth said to her Jewish mother-in-law, Well, your people will be my people and your God will be my God.

[9 : 41] And she was joined to the people of God. She became a Jew. And she married a Jew, didn't she? Boaz, and so on. Well, that happened. But it was the exception.

Israel was the uniquely blessed nation out of all the peoples on the earth. The most privileged status belonged to them because they were the people of God.

They had received the covenant promises. To them was given the revelation of God, the scriptures. To them were given the divine worship and the sacrificial system and the temple.

To them was given God's guiding and protecting presence. And from them, the Messiah would one day come. That was Israel, God's people. But what about the other nations?

Paul will tell us in Acts chapter 17 that in the past, God let those nations go their own way. In their ignorance and idolatry. He let them perish in their sin.

[10:42] With only an occasional prophet sent to them. You remember Jonah was sent to Nineveh. The Gentiles in Nineveh. But now, that was then, Paul says, in the past, God overlooked and just let them go on their way without the light of the gospel.

But now, Paul says, with Christ coming and death and resurrection, now, this has dramatically changed. For now, he commands all people everywhere to repent.

First, that message went to the Jews and others as they heard it. But it was mainly the Jews. Now, to all peoples.

Telling them to come to Christ and to join themselves to him. This seismic shift can be seen in Jesus' words to his disciples.

When Jesus was on the earth, in Matthew chapter 10, verses 5 and 6, he sent out his 12 disciples to go preach the gospel. And here's what he told them. Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans.

[11:48] Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now, you need to understand. Wow, do you see the privileged people that Israel were? They were the ones chosen to be his people.

And to them, Jesus sent his disciples. Don't go to the Gentiles. Don't go to the Samaritans. Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But all this was to change with the establishing of a new covenant in Jesus' blood.

And by his death and resurrection, what did Jesus say to these same disciples after he rose from the dead and was about to ascend into heaven? He said to them, go and make disciples of all nations.

Do you see the difference? Before his death and resurrection, which established a new covenant, a new people of God, before that it was go to the Israelites, not the Gentiles.

Now, go and make disciples of all nations. And by that, by the way, he did not mean go and see if you can find some scattered Jews out there among the nations and make disciples of the diaspora, the scattered Jews.

[13:02] No, that's not what he meant. He meant go and make disciples of the nations, those Gentiles, those pagans. That was his plan. Now, this is huge.

You can see the shift, the change from old covenant to new covenant. That would take some doing for the church to understand, even though they were told from the very beginning, when God first established his covenant, his old covenant with their father Abraham.

He told them in Genesis 12 that through him, all peoples on the earth will be blessed. From the very beginning of the old covenant, it was always with a plan.

I've chosen you that from you might come blessing to the ends of the earth, to all peoples, not just to the Jews. And Paul quotes that passage in Galatians chapter 3, and he says that text was saying ahead of time that God would justify the Gentiles by faith in Jesus Christ.

The blessings that were to flow to all peoples, it was justifying, saving blessings that would come through faith in Christ to the Gentiles. So it was God's plan from the beginning of that old covenant.

[14:18] But it was God's plan from eternity past, as we've been memorizing this week from Isaiah chapter 49, when the father said to his son, It's too small a thing for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel that I have kept.

No, I will also make you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. So from eternity past, God planned to include the Gentiles in the new covenant church of Jesus Christ.

And here in Acts 10, we learn that this plan was to wait no longer. Now is the time. Go get them. Go with the gospel. Gather my sheep who hear my voice and trust in me.

Now the critical importance of this issue is seen in the amount of ink that Luke spills over it in the book of Acts. We talked about how much space that the Holy Spirit through Luke gave to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

Repeated three times. Luke spills more ink over the conversion of Cornelius than he did the conversion of Saul. All 48 verses of chapter 10 are given to it.

[15 : 34] Much of chapter 11 is a repetition in detail of Cornelius' conversion and baptism. And then it's mentioned again in the Jerusalem Council in Acts chapter 15, when this issue almost split the church into two.

This was no little thing. It's huge. As small as it is to us, are the Gentiles included? And on what basis? It was a huge issue for them. And its importance is not only seen in the amount of verses given to it in Luke's letter, but it's seen as well in the amount of supernatural, special revelation that came from God to man to convey it.

We have supernatural visions. We have signs given to teach the church. The Lord Jesus is guiding his church over this huge hurdle of what held them back from going to the Gentiles.

Jesus is teaching his church the full inclusion of full-fledged Gentiles. And that's why the apostle Peter figures so big in this story.

Jesus chose handpicked these apostles and taught them and sent them to be the foundational builders of his church. And to them he gave the keys of the kingdom.

[16 : 48] And in this incident, the Lord Jesus is teaching Peter as an apostle how to use the keys of the kingdom to open the door of the church wide to the Gentile world.

That was a huge thing. And the Lord will use vision and signs to make it clear to Peter. So let's see how the Lord teaches his church to take this next big step beyond Judea, beyond Palestine, to the ends of the earth, indeed to Gentiles.

Well, he's going to do it by another divine appointment. We've seen that in the book of Acts. He brings two people together. We've seen that. And he's going to do it that way again. And this time he's going to prepare each, Peter, the apostle, and Cornelius, the centurion.

He's going to prepare each of them for the other by a vision. And we need to understand that a vision was a direct revelation of God's mind to the person.

It was one of the ways that God revealed truth to people in visions and dreams. And so this is a supernatural revelation of God to both Peter and to Cornelius.

[18 : 06] So we're introduced first to Cornelius and his vision. He lives in Caesarea. That was the headquarters of the Roman Empire that was occupying Israel, right on the Mediterranean coast.

He's a centurion. He's got a hundred soldiers under his command. And he's part of the Italian regimen, a group of about a thousand soldiers. And he gets paid five times what the usual soldier gets.

He's a wealthy man and a man of influence as the centurion. And probably one of the more important things for us to understand is, therefore, that he's a Gentile.

He's an Italian. He's not one of the Jews. He's a non-Jew. That's what we mean by Gentile. One of the nations. But he is a God-fearer.

And we meet these God-fearing Gentiles throughout the book of Acts. And here he is, one of these Gentiles. But there were a significant amount of Gentiles who were dissatisfied with the polytheism of their nation and of the low ethics that grew out of their religion.

[19 : 20] And they were attracted, as pagans, they were attracted to Judaism. They taught that there was just one God. And they had a high ethical standard that appealed to them.

Much as we find even today, people are attracted to the Mormon religion and to Jehovah Witnesses because they have a high moral ethics. And so it was that these Gentiles became God-fearers.

He had not yet converted to Judaism as a full proselyte because he had not submitted to circumcision and following all the ceremonial laws.

But he did give generously to the poor and prayed to God regularly. So he's up in his house praying at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the ordinary time of prayer, when he receives an extraordinary revelation from God.

A vision. And in the vision, there's something seen and something heard. He suddenly saw an angel, a messenger from the God of heaven, in shining clothes who called him by name Cornelius.

[20 : 30] That would stop any of us. And he told him that God had noticed his giving and his praying. And then he gave him something to do with very explicit instruction.

Send to Joppa. That was 30 miles down the coast to Joppa. And bring back a man named Simon, who is also called Peter.

And don't confuse him with this other Simon because he's staying with another Simon, Simon the Tanner, whose house is by the sea. Why is Peter there? Well, you remember, he got called there by the church to heal or to raise Dorcas from the dead.

And so he's there at Simon's house by the sea of Joppa. And so send these men and have them bring Peter, and he will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.

We see that in chapter 11 and verse 14. Now, the response of this Gentile Cornelius is immediate. He gathers two of his servants and a devout soldier, and he tells them the vision he had, and he sends them down to Joppa once to fetch Peter.

[21 : 42] Now, that's just one side of the meeting, isn't it? That's just one side of the preparations. And let me say that was the far easier side of the preparation. The far greater preparation will be with Peter.

Peter, who's got Bible verses to go against this sort of meeting, and who's got hundreds of years of Jewish practice and prejudice to be overcome.

Without preparing Peter, these three from Cornelius would have come to Joppa and turned around and gone back empty-handed and disappointed to Cornelius.

Peter was not about to come and enter the house of a Gentile. So Peter needs to be prepared, and to him is given a vision as well. It's the next day, about noon, and those three men from Cornelius are nearing Joppa, and Peter is found up on the flat roof of his host, Simon the Tanner, praying and waiting for lunch, and he falls into a trance, which he tells us in that trance he saw a vision.

Again, this is a divine communication from the head of the church, Jesus Christ. He sees things, and he hears things. First, what he saw.

[22 : 59] Heaven opened, and something like a sheet was let down out of heaven by its four corners. You played the game, young people, where you grab the corners of the sheet, and there's a balloon in it, and you stretch it and shoot the water balloon.

There's the sheet, only it's not just a water balloon in it. It's filled with all kinds of four-legged animals, and birds, and creeping things, reptiles.

It was a virtual zoo in a blanket, is what he sees, being lowered down from the four corners, out of heaven, the place of God. And then he heard a voice, the Lord himself calling him by name, just as he had called Cornelius by name, and giving him something to do, just as he had given Cornelius something to do.

Get up, Peter, kill and eat. How could God be telling him that? For God's own word in Leviticus forbid the Jews from eating these unclean animals.

So impulsive, Peter answers at once, Surely not, Lord, I have never eaten anything impure or unclean. And the voice from heaven replies with a rebuke, Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.

[24 : 21] And Peter is intractable. He's stubborn, and he's not changing. He's holding his position. And so it all happens again.

Down comes the sheet full of animals. And the voice from the Lord, Get up, Peter, kill and eat. And his refusal, Not so, Lord, I've never eaten anything.

And the rebuke, Don't call unclean anything unclean that I have made clean. And it happened again, A third time. And then the whole thing went back up into heaven.

And now Peter's scratching his head. And he's wondering, What did that mean? Why did I have, What's the meaning of this?

It's interesting that the Gentile unbeliever responded better to the Lord than the Jewish believer in Jesus at this point. But he doesn't have, More light.

[25 : 25] He needs more light. More information. And just when he needs it, It's given to him. He receives further instruction from the Holy Spirit. This is another direct revelation from God to Peter.

And here's the revelation. Simon, three men are looking for you, So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, For I have sent them. So here's the Holy Spirit of Jesus Guiding his church and his servant here Through this important step.

Because he otherwise would never have gone with them And entered the Gentile Cornelius' house. So this message from the Spirit Was the counterpart of the threefold vision that he'd had earlier.

And I want us to see the connection between The vision of the sheet And the words of the Holy Spirit. About unclean food, He was told, Get up, kill and eat.

About the unclean Gentiles, He's told, Get up and don't hesitate to go with them. He's told, Don't call anything impure that God has made clean.

[26 : 39] And then he's told, Do not hesitate to go with them, For I have sent them. You see, In both cases of unclean food, In the first vision, And unclean people, The three men waiting outside, There is something that God has done.

Something that God himself has done That is to influence Peter's behavior. Because the unclean food, God has made clean. And the unclean men, God has sent.

So don't hesitate, Peter, To go with them. You see how he connects unclean food, And unclean people, In a way that Peter gets the message.

God's purpose for the temporary food laws, Of unclean food, And clean food for Israel, Had been fulfilled. And so it's abolished. Those laws are no longer, Applicable to the new covenant people of God.

But those food laws being abolished, Had a much wider application, Not only about unclean food, But about unclean people. Do not call anything impure, That God has made clean.

[27 : 55] Neither food, Nor people. F.F. Bruce comments, It was largely because of their carelessness, In food matters, That Gentiles were ritually unsafe people, For a pious Jew to meet socially.

So it was the laws about unclean food, That made the Gentiles, The people, Unclean. But with those laws of the food, Abolished, There was no reason to keep your distance, From the Gentiles. And with the additional words, From the Holy Spirit, Peter connected the dots. The message about unclean foods, And the message about unclean people. So Peter went down, And he told the three Gentile men, I'm the one you're looking for, Why have you come?

And they told him the whole story, And he invited them in as his guests, To spend the night, And they set off the next day, For Cornelius' house. Peter knew something groundbreaking, Was happening.

I mean, You don't have visions every day. And even the apostle Peter, Did not have visions every day. He knew something was up. And so he took, A group of Jewish brothers from Joppa, To go along with him as witnesses.

[29 : 08] And that will be very important, In the next chapter. And so the next day, They arrive, The thirty miles in Caesarea, And Peter finds the house of Cornelius, Filled with his relatives and friends, All waiting on edge to hear him.

And then Peter did it. He put his foot out, And he stepped across the threshold, And entered the house of a Gentile.

Now that was a drum roll event. Nothing to us. We enter Gentiles' houses every time we go home. But to him, This was staggering. He wouldn't have done that before.

But he does now. He does now. It took a three-fold vision, And words from that vision, And a verifying vision to Cornelius that matched his, And words of the Holy Spirit, To connect it all, But he entered the Gentile's house.

And his opening words to the house full of Gentiles are these, Verse 28, You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.

[30 : 27] But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure, Any man impure, Or unclean.

So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. Notice, It's God. God has shown me. I didn't know this before, But God has now shown this to me.

He's the one who had made the food and the people unclean before. He's the only one who could now remove such laws of unclean food and men. God has shown me.

And he says, I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, But accepts men from every nation. Amen. And we'll see next week how God went on to save these Gentiles, And made it clear to all present that he had given them his Holy Spirit, That the whole church might know that Gentiles as Gentiles were now to be included in the church of Jesus Christ, Not by being circumcised and keeping the ceremonial law, But by having faith in the Lord Jesus and repentance toward his name.

So, This was a huge step, And I think that it will do a service, To understand not only chapter 10, But 11 and 15, And Romans and Corinthians, And other places in the word of God, If we would see, What was the big deal that made it so difficult to get Peter over that threshold?

[31 : 55] And made it so difficult for the church of Jesus Christ to go to the ends of the earth, With the gospel to the Gentiles? Well, it all went back to the purity laws that Moses, That God through Moses gave to his people Israel.

They were temporary laws that God gave to his special people Israel, For a special time until Christ. Laws about clean and unclean foods, And clean and unclean people.

And we see here that the two are intimately related. So, I don't know how many of you have been having devotions in Leviticus recently. I know of one of you, because you shared that with me. But we ought to read it.

And we need to know that those things loomed large in Peter and the Jewish people, Those first five books, The Pentateuch. And in Leviticus 11, We have these laws about clean and unclean foods for Israel.

There were specific animals and insects that were okay to eat, Whereas others were forbidden. And they're told which is which. Sometime in particular, by name. Others by whether they chew the cud or have a cloven hoof.

[33 : 03] And it's all spelled out for them very clearly. Which animals are clean and which are unclean. So you could enjoy your beef and locust burgers, But no pulled pork or shrimp and lobster for you, If you're a Jew.

Oh, but I like pulled pork. And my neighbor has it on his grill. And it smells wonderful. Oh, I can get all I can eat of shrimp. Red lobster on Tuesday nights.

Didn't matter. If you're a Jew, you don't eat it. It's unclean. It's off the diet. Now there's different ideas put forth about why certain animals and insects were forbidden as unclean.

One view is that those were used in false religions. In their worship of their God. And so those were forbidden to be even eaten by the Israelites.

It just doesn't hold up. Maybe there are instances where there's a match, but it doesn't hold up.

What was the animal that the Israelites made a golden thing out of?

[34 : 05] It was a bull calf. Used in the worship. The false worship of Baal. They could eat beef. No problem. You see, it doesn't work.

It doesn't fit. That's not the reason. Others would say, no, it has to do with hygiene and health.

Maybe these animals were unhealthy. And therefore, they were rejected.

Again, it just doesn't hold up. It would be in similar hygienic situations that years after Leviticus, the Lord Jesus would say of those very same animals and insects, they're clean.

You can eat them. Indeed, everything that God had made was good. It doesn't hold up. That may have some situation significant, but it doesn't hold up. That can't be the reason.

There were other things that shouldn't have been eaten then that were problematic in that way. It wasn't bacteria. It wasn't something unhealthy, at least not at the very heart. There was something symbolic going on here.

[35 : 04] And what is said in the book of Leviticus was that the Lord was teaching them to make a distinction. He says, What made it unclean for them?

The word of God. This is unclean for you. This is clean. Let's go back to the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3. All the trees of the Garden were clean for Adam and Eve. They could eat of them. But there was one tree that was unclean.

It was forbidden. Why was it forbidden? Just simply because God forbade them to eat it. And that became then a test of obedience, didn't it?

A test, a proof of loyalty and lordship, right down to their daily diet. And it reminds us, doesn't it, that every time they sat down to eat, I should say, they were reminded.

[36 : 21] Every time these Old Testament Israelites sat down to meal, they were reminded that God is Lord of all. And his word is law, determining everything that I do and don't do down to the very menu on the table.

He's Lord. He's our God. We're his people. And it also reminded them of that important calling that God had upon them.

The importance of their holiness in the whole of life. The repeated motto in Leviticus is, be holy for I am holy. By the way, that's the motto that Peter gives to the Christian, too, in 1 Peter 1.16.

But Leviticus said at first, I'm the Lord your God. Consecrate yourself and be holy because I'm holy. Be set apart from the nations and the rest of the peoples as my people and be holy like I'm holy.

So each time they sat down to eat, they were reminded that God had chosen them out of all the nations to be his own peculiar people. And to be like him, to be holy, set apart to him.

[37 : 30] And one of the ways they demonstrated that they were set apart from all the nations was their peculiar diet. It distinguished them from the nations around them.

It was one of those barriers or markers that said, these are God's people. And it comes down to the very things that they will and will not eat. Dietary laws were a marker of their special status as being the holy, the set apart people of God for his service.

So that's something of the rationale behind these laws of clean and unclean foods. More could be said. But those laws were inseparably bound up with laws about clean and unclean people.

And that's what I want you to understand. Because to eat unclean food made you an unclean person. Do not defile yourselves by any animal, bird, or anything that moves along the ground.

Those which I have set apart is unclean for you. You see, when you eat them, you defile yourself. You become unclean. What does that mean? Well, that means that you are ceremonially unclean.

[38 : 42] Unfit for God's fellowship, his presence. You couldn't go into the temple, the sanctuary. You had to keep your distance. Sometimes till evening, and then the uncleanness was over.

Sometimes you had to wash with special water made out of the ashes of a red heifer. Sometimes you needed blood sacrifices. All sorts of legislation on how to become clean and ready again to go in and worship and fellowship with God.

But to eat unclean food made the person unclean. And so there were many, many, many ways by which people themselves became ceremonially unclean.

Unfit for God. Not just eating unclean food. Let's say, for instance, that a mouse, which was an unclean animal, fell into an open jar of flour.

Well, the jar and everything in it is now unclean. And so is mom when she comes along and makes pancakes out of that flour. And everybody else in the table who eats that.

[39 : 50] They became unclean people by eating unclean food. Even touching a dead animal. Touching a dead person.

To be in a tent where a person had died. To have certain diseases. To have certain discharges from the body. To have contact with others who did.

You were ceremonially unclean. Unfit for God's fellowship. Listen to this from Numbers 19.22. Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean.

And anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening. So think, someone became unclean this morning.

In one of the hundreds of ways to become unclean. And maybe you had some sausage for breakfast. You're unclean.

[40 : 48] Okay? And you come to church. And you shook hands with the usher at the door. He's unclean. And so is everybody else that comes through that door and shakes hands with him.

Now, they're all unclean. And I notice you sat down. Well, your seat's unclean. And so is anybody else that comes and sits there.

And on and on it goes. Can you see how difficult it would be to keep yourself from being unclean ceremonially?

To keep yourself in a state of being fit for the presence of God? Can you see how this would start to dominate all of your thought and much of your life?

And if all of that seems like an unbearably heavy yoke around your neck, you're not alone. Peter himself, who lived under that legislation, will say when we come to Acts chapter 15 in the Jerusalem Council.

[41 : 51] He'll say to those people who are trying to make Gentile believers in Jesus to have to obey all these ceremonial laws. He'll say, since God purified their hearts by faith, then why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers could bear?

This was a heavy yoke. You're constantly trying to keep yourself clean. You're constantly needing cleansing.

Exactly. These are types and shadows. And I would say we better learn the same lesson. How we are constantly, day by day, moment by moment, in need of cleansing.

If we are to walk with Him in the light, who has no light, no darkness, no none at all, we need to be clean over and over and over again.

Well, think if you were a Jew living beside a Gentile neighbor. And he invites you over to his house for supper. Are you going?

[43 : 13] Are you going? Well, he might have found a dead rat in the garden that morning and just grabbed it and threw it in the compost pile. And so he's unclean.

And so is the chair. He came in and sat on in the table and the lettuce and the corn that he picked in the garden. He's got no consciousness about all these food laws.

He's not living by them. Can you even afford to step foot into his house and run the risk of becoming unclean? So you see that these food laws and the clean and unclean people that went with them, it had the effect of keeping the Jews separate and set apart from the Gentiles, which did serve a purpose of God under the old covenant, for they were not to learn their ways and to follow their gods and to become like them.

And that purpose had been served because now the gospel is to go to the Gentiles. So with this background then about unclean and clean foods and unclean and clean peoples, I trust we can better understand why Peter objected three times to eating the unclean animals and why he would have hesitated to go with the Gentiles back to a Gentile's house.

And we can better understand, I think as well, the surprise of the Samaritan woman when Jesus the Jew was sitting there on the well and she drew water from the well with her pitcher and he asked her for a drink because she knew that he was a Jew and she was a Samaritan and that the Jews do not have dealings with the Samaritan.

[44 : 57] And it had to do with that pitcher. The rabbis had actually passed a law that it was forbidden for a Jew to drink from a pitcher of a Samaritan.

Well, you can see the background, where it's coming from, all this Leviticus law and so on. But they had gone further and made their own law and so she's shocked that he wants to drink from her pitcher.

And perhaps it better explains the behavior of the Jewish leaders who had arrested Christ and drug him before their kangaroo court and found him guilty of blasphemy and now they've got to drag him before Pilate, the Roman governor, so that he will see that he needs to be put to death.

And they took him to the palace of the Roman governor, seeking the death sentence. And we read, by now it was early morning and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, the Jews did not enter the palace.

They wanted to be able to eat the Passover. To do what Peter did would have made them unclean, unfit, for the religious ceremony of Passover meal that was to be eaten that day.

[46 : 12] They didn't want to miss that. And so they are fastidious about ceremonial uncleanness, even while they are seeking to murder the Son of God and to do it with lies if they have to.

That's what Jesus calls straining at gnats, straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Now there was no specific law in the Old Testament that said, thou shalt not enter into a Gentile's house.

But I trust you can see that with all the food laws and the ways to become unclean, the effect of the whole law was to keep them from entering homes of Gentiles and risking defilement.

Since Gentiles didn't care or bother with such laws, and could almost be sure that Gentiles were always in a state of uncleanness. And the rabbis themselves had gone further and had interpreted that Levitical law and made their own additional laws as they often did, and made those to be as binding upon the people as the Levitical law itself.

So Mark chapter 7 finds Pharisees and some of these teachers of the law. And they're watching Jesus' disciples, and they notice that they're eating food with hands that were unclean, that is, unwashed.

[47 : 35] And Mark then explains, And so the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, Why don't your disciples live according to the traditions of the elders, instead of eating their food with unclean hands?

It's not that they were clean freaks. It's not that they were concerned about bacteria. Rather, they were fastidiously concerned about the purity laws of Leviticus, and becoming ceremonially unclean if they touched anything.

So as you were passing through the marketplace, mingling among Gentiles, how do you know whether you touched someone who was unclean, or touched produce that was made unclean in some way?

And so to avoid defilement and any possibility of defilement, they had devised a whole scheme of washing, a ceremonial washing before they ate, and they wondered why Jesus' disciples didn't live according to these traditions of the elders.

You see, they expected everyone to follow in lockstep, and Jesus and his disciples did not. Jesus says, And why do you set aside the commands of God by your traditions handed down?

[49 : 15] Your religion is nothing more than rules taught by men, and your heart's not in it. For they had added their own rules, and Jesus then said to the crowd, Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him.

Rather, it's what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. Now that had them scratching their heads. We're told that when they went into the house, the disciples asked him the meaning of his words.

And let me remind you, Peter was there that day. Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather, it's what comes out of a man that makes him unclean.

Lord, what do you mean by that? And he says, Are you so dull? Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean?

For it doesn't go into his heart, that center of his personality, but into his stomach and then out the body. What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean.

[50 : 19] For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly.

All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean. Now, Peter didn't catch the full implication of what Jesus said that day, but he did later.

He did after he had three times a sheet from heaven with unclean beasts and a voice from heaven saying, Rise, kill, and eat, and don't you call unclean what I, what God has made clean.

And he got it, you see. And so now when Mark is writing in Mark chapter 7, it's years later. All of that has happened. Cornelius has been saved.

The Jerusalem council has been. It's 10, 20, 30 years later when Mark, who is the son of the faith to Peter, closely associated to Peter, writes this story about Jesus talking about what makes a man clean.

[51 : 24] Unclean is not what comes from outside, but what comes from within. And so Mark puts in a parenthesis. In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.

Okay? When Jesus taught that, he was saying, those Old Testament ceremonial laws about food and men being unclean, that's gone. Everything is now open for people to eat.

Well, looking back, Peter realized that Jesus was saying that day that those purity laws had fulfilled their purpose and were abolished for the new covenant people of God.

But you see, they were symbols. They were meant to teach greater things. They were meant to point to how holy our God is. So holy that he cannot live with sinners who are unclean in his sight. That because he's holy, we must be holy to have fellowship with him, to be fit for his presence, that he requires a perfect purity, not only in action, but of heart.

[52 : 29] These laws were meant to point us to how sinful and defiled we are, unqualified for fellowship with God, ever in need of cleansing, and that our great problem is not with some outward ceremonial uncleanness that sticks to us, but with an inward defilement, that it's our heart, that source and fountain of all of our thinking and speaking and doing, that is itself defiled and is ever spewing forth its pollution and therefore defiling everything we think and do and say.

That's my problem. And every single sin in my life can be traced back to my sinful heart. It's what comes out of there that makes a man unclean.

There's my real problem before a holy God. Not whether or not I keep myself from eating bacon, but a sinful heart that loves to sin against God.

Not ceremonial uncleanness, but real moral uncleanness of heart and life and no amount of obeying ceremonial purity laws can cleanse the heart from being the polluting fountain, polluting and defiling whatever we touch.

You see, I am the contagious guy. I am the one that is unsafe to be around. I am the one that if you get near me, you will become unclean because my heart is unclean.

[54 : 00] It's all meant to press us, press us. Where can we find a fountain for sin and uncleanness such as we find in here?

Where can I find? What can I find to wash my heart clean from sin?

What can wash away my sin? And the Bible answers, there is a fountain open for sin and uncleanness where sinners lose all their guilty stain.

And his name is Jesus because the blood of Jesus, God's son, cleanses from every sin. And if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to purify us from all unrighteousness.

Christ died for sin once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. You see, it's through his blood that we're made fit for God's presence and fellowship with him.

[55 : 03] That one sacrifice for sin can cleanse and make us fit for God's presence. And so there's infinite merit in the blood of Jesus for the worst of sinners, for Jews and Gentiles, moral and immoral people, religious or irreligious.

Such were some of you, but you were what? You were washed. Yes, you were washed. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.

And so the Lord Jesus says, come now and let's have a talk together. Let's reason together. You and me. You got unclean heart? I've got cleansing blood.

Come now. Let's talk about it because I am able to take your sin that is as scarlet and make it as white as snow. And though they be red like crimson to make them like wool, come with your defiled heart, whether for the first time or the hundredth time, the thousandth time.

Come and wash. Have your conscience cleaned, your heart pure before your God, the separating sin removed. Enjoy God, whom you were never meant to live without.

[56 : 21] Let's pray. Lord, we are thankful for even Leviticus and the way that it teaches us how holy you are and how sinful we are and how in need of cleansing and washing we are.

And we're thankful that your word did not end there, but that it came to the cross where that fountain was open for our sin and uncleanness and that the blood of Jesus has cleansed us.

Though how we need him, how we get defiled and dirty, not from the outside, but from the things that come out of these hearts of ours. Forgive us and wash us and cleanse us anew.

And thank you that one day we'll not only be saved from the power of reigning sin, but we will be saved altogether from its presence, washed in the blood of Christ, presented in his robes of righteousness.

Thank you, God, for giving us your Son and this cleansing in his blood. Bring others today to trust in him and to be saved. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.