

Understanding Ceremonial Law - ©2002 Rev. Fred Klett

While some of the ceremonial laws seem to have a health component, many do not. Why should a woman be unclean longer after giving birth to a female? Why are there no unclean plants when so many plants are deadly poisonous? Why would a carp be clean and a catfish unclean when both are bottom feeders which eat the same muck? The laws of the Temple, the laws of clean and unclean, the laws separating the priests from the people, the laws separating Jews from Gentiles-- all these things are typological, spiritual, and for the purpose of pointing to a greater reality: Messiah and his redemption.

Professor Doug Green puts it this way:¹

Likewise, Israel. Not merely different from the nations but different in a "Godward direction." They were meant to bear the stamp of Yahweh. To live up on the "God-end" of life. It appears that the Israelites conceived of the world in terms of a continuum or spectrum with God on one side and all that was "anti-God" on the other.

The Two Poles of Existence²

God	"Anti-God"
Sacred/Holy/Clean	Profane/Unholy/Unclean
Life	Death
Order	Chaos/Disorder
Normality/Conformity	Abnormality/Deformity

Israel would be *holy* not only by being different from the surrounding nations but also by reflecting all these "God characteristics" to the world. To repeat what I've said before, the nations were supposed to learn about God from looking at Israel. The nations were not supposed to look at Israel and merely say, "Aren't they different from us" but also, "Aren't they different and this tells us something about what Israel's God is like.."

Green summarizes the meaning of ritual purity in the Levitical system as follows:

God → High Priest → Priest (*holy*) → Israelite (*male*) (*clean*) → Deformed → Gentiles (*unclean*) → Dead

Summarized: in general terms: Holy → Clean → Unclean

In other words, there is a deeply spiritual meaning in the Levitical system of ritual purity. Laws of clean and unclean to point to the holiness of God. These principles are eternal and never become obsolete. However, the *external rites* that communicated these things were for a specific time, the time leading up to their full expression in the work of Messiah, our great High Priest, who has brought a superior order of priesthood. Jesus makes us kosher! According to this understanding, though I don't believe these laws of ritual purity are any longer binding upon New Covenant believers, we don't reject the ceremonial laws of the Torah. We simply believe, based on Apostolic teaching, that the old way of *expressing* the true spiritual meaning of the ceremonial laws is now obsolete. We are to live out the *spiritual significance* of the ceremonial law, that *meaning* which finds its fulfillment in Yeshua and the salvation he has accomplished. It has been accomplished in our justification and is being lived out in our sanctification. As believers in Messiah we are washed clean through his blood and called to be, by the power of the Spirit, "Holy to the Lord." As Paul said:

Let the word of Messiah dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.. (Colossians 3:16-17)

And again:

...whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

Surely, this is the meaning of the Law. This is the essence of what it means to be clean, to be kosher. To observe the Torah doesn't so much mean to keep the ceremonial laws in terms of their externals, rather it means to understand what they pointed to, and to keep the essence of their spiritual meaning through being sanctified to God through Messiah. This aspect of what it means to truly follow the Torah has not been adequately understood in rabbinic Judaism.

1. Green, Doug, OT Professor at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, From a lecture given at New Life PCA, Glenside, PA February 2002. **Tapes can be ordered.**

2. Green says: See Wenham, *Christ's Healing Ministry*, p. 123: whose positive and negative poles of existence are: God—Chaos, Life—Death, Order—Disorder, Normality—Deformity, Cleanness—Uncleanness. See also Douglas Davies, *An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus*, ZAW 89 (1977) 387-99 (394): Sacred—Profane, God—Gentiles, Temple—Wilderness, Life—Death, Being—Nothingness, Order—Chaos.