

You Are What You Eat

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 May 2026

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0:00] You've probably heard the phrase, you are what you eat, right? The idea of that is that the food that we choose to eat in our lives, the food, the diet we choose to have, the food we choose to take in to our bodies determines what our bodies become, right?

How heavy we are, how much energy we have, how fit we are. A lot of that is determined by the food that we choose to eat. But that idea of you are what you eat is not just for food, right? Everything we take and the ideas that we take into our mind, the attitudes that we absorb from the people and the world around us, whatever we choose to take in to ourselves will ultimately end up making us who we are.

And that is why this bizarre chapter about ancient Israelite food laws is actually more relevant to us than we think. Now, it doesn't apply directly to us, okay?

That's the first thing we need to understand. This was written to the Israelites thousands of years ago in a particular situation. But it's in the Bible.

[1:15] God wants us and he's preserved this chapter and all of these laws in Leviticus for us because they have something to say to us. And this chapter, I believe it, teaches us a vital spiritual truth, which is that God's people in every age need to learn how to distinguish between what is clean and unclean in their own lives and to be aware of what we are taking in in our lives.

And so we're going to look at that. And the first thing I want us to see in this chapter is that holiness is an everyday thing. Holiness is not just for Sunday.

So as a recap of just what we've learned so far in Leviticus, Leviticus teaches us all about what needs to happen for God's people to come close to God, right?

That's essentially what the purpose of all of these laws and the whole point of Leviticus is. How do God's people come close to him? Remember in Exodus, God has come to dwell with his people. But how do his people now come to dwell with him and be close to him? And it's an important question because God's presence, being in God's presence, dwelling with God, is the source of all joy and blessing in life.

[2:42] It is the secret to all true happiness. All the things that we are yearning for in our life is actually found in dwelling with God, in being in God's presence, in being in relationship with God. But there's a problem, right?

We learned last week, Leviticus 10, that coming to God's presence is also very dangerous for sinners. And so we've got this tension in Leviticus that God wants his people to dwell with him. That's where all life and blessing comes from. But it is dangerous for sinners to come close to God because of this concept of being unclean, which we see over and over again in Leviticus. We are unclean because of the sin that is inside each one of us. And this uncleanness cannot come into contact with God's holiness and survive. Remember, we learned and Leviticus teaches us about these categories that exist.

There's holy and then there's clean and then there's unclean. And the clean is the buffer between the unclean and the holy because unclean can never come into contact with holiness of God. And so that's why you have all these weird priesthood and laws and stuff in the Old Testament to teach us that concept.

[3:52] And God's people needed to understand these truths and they needed to therefore learn and follow the way God has made to approach him safely.

And they also had to learn to distinguish. As part of this process of following God's way, they needed to learn to distinguish in their lives what is clean and unclean.

Remember last week, that's what God said to Aaron. Teach the people to distinguish between the holy and the common and the clean and the unclean. And that's what these next few chapters now

in Leviticus are all about.

So this next section, which is Leviticus 11 to 15, is all about how the Israelites were to distinguish in their lives between the clean and the unclean. But it starts in a very strange way.

It starts with a very everyday discipline of eating. Who would have thought that holiness started at the dinner table?

[4 : 58] And this food that God says the Israelites were allowed and not allowed to eat, God was using that as a reminder to them every day, multiple times a day, when they prepared food, when they came to eat food three times a day.

It was a constant reminder when they thought of what we're allowed to eat and what we're not allowed to eat. It was a reminder that they needed to keep distinguishing between what is clean and unclean in their lives.

On a daily basis. Not just when they go to the temple or the synagogue, but on a daily basis. In their homes, in their daily lives, they needed to think what is clean and what is unclean.

And so God is providing these categories for them to think about in their daily lives. Now, it's not that these animals that were not allowed to be eaten by the Jews were themselves bad.

Or they were, for some reason, dirtier than the other animals or unhygienic, while the other animals that they were allowed to eat were hygienic. It's actually got nothing to do with hygiene, like some people think.

[6 : 10] Because God has actually made all of these animals. God designed all of these animals. God designed them and made them good in creation. But if you read carefully, what you'll notice is this phrase over and over again, that these are unclean for you.

Or you are to regard them as unclean. In other words, they're not unclean necessarily bad or evil in and of themselves. But God wanted the Israelites to regard certain animals as unclean for them. In other words, God is using their diet as a daily teaching aid, a daily reminder to the Jews of what a holy life consists of.

And it would remind them when they thought about the animals they weren't allowed to eat and what each of those animals actually symbolized, what they represented.

Why the particular animals that God chooses? And so they had to think about this. Because I bet you're all wondering. I was wondering at the beginning of this week when I was starting to prepare, why are these animals?

[7 : 17] Why not other animals? And the truth is that they all symbolize something that God wants the Israelites to think about. And if we're going to understand Leviticus 11, we need to understand what these animals symbolized.

Okay, so that's what we need to look at. So as we look at Leviticus 11, let's try and understand and unpack the different types of animals that are mentioned.

Now it seems random as we look at the chapter. You know that they could eat birds, but they couldn't eat a seagull. They could eat a cow, but not a camel.

They could eat a locust, but not a bat. What's up with that? But it starts to make sense when we realize what the different animals represent.

And this is key. And the reason that the animals they were to consider as unclean were unclean is because they represented particular aspects of the fallen world or of sin that God wanted his people daily to think about and avoid in their lives.

[8 : 24] Okay, so you've got basically three different categories of animals that are mentioned and to be considered as unclean by the Jews. Firstly, animals that blurred boundaries of creation.

Animals that blurred the boundaries of creation. So back in Genesis when God created, right? Created the world and created the sea and created the mountains and created everything. God established boundaries.

You see this repeated phrase in Genesis, God separated. God separated. God separated the darkness from the light. God separated the sea from the land. And God's separation was necessary.

These boundaries in creation are necessary for life to flourish. And it's good that God creates these boundaries. We know in our own lives, boundaries are necessary, right? Boundaries are important. We want to just do what we want, but we know actually having boundaries in our life is vital. That's because God created creation with boundaries necessary for life.

[9 : 23] Now in the animal kingdom, God also made different categories of animals. We read in Genesis, he made animals for the land, animals for the air, and animals for the water. But also, because God has a sense of humor, he made some really weird animals that don't quite fit in one or other of those categories.

They don't cleanly fit. Like the ostrich. Okay? What's up with the ostrich? It's a bird, but it can't fly. Okay?

The bat. The bat, what is that? Is it a rodent? Is it a bird? The eel. The eel is like a snake, but it swims in the sea.

And so these are animals, and you'll notice that they're listed as animals that the Israelites weren't allowed to eat, because they didn't fit cleanly into one category or another.

Now you might be asking, where's the ostrich in here? It's actually a translation thing. In the NIV, in verse 16, the translation is actually horned owl, but most other translations go with ostrich.

[10 : 32] It's a Hebrew word that didn't exist in any other Hebrew writings, and so the scholars were like, what does it actually mean? But modern scholars have most likely translated it as ostrich.

And so it fits this first category of ostrich, bat, eel, all these other creatures of animals that somehow blur the boundaries of God's created order.

And that's why the Israelites weren't allowed to eat these animals that kind of existed in the gray area of God's order. To remind the Israelites that they can't be people who live outside the boundaries that God has created.

Remember, these animals were just meant to be there as reminders of them daily of what it means to live a holy life. And one of the aspects of that is we've got to live cleanly within the boundaries God has established in our lives, which the rest of the world wasn't doing.

Because sin is basically crossing boundaries. It's doing what we want rather than what God wants. And so the Israelites were to be distinct from that, to be different. And one of the ways to remind them of that was through their diets.

[11 : 44] They had to be, if they were going to live in relationship with God, anybody who wants to live in close relationship with God, they had to be people who lived clearly within God's created purposes.

So that's the first group. But that doesn't explain all the animals listed. The second group of animals were animals that were in some way associated with disorder or randomness.

Okay, so originally, God created the world with order. We read about the world before the fall, creation before the fall. It was a place of order and predictability.

Things like storms that we experienced last Monday and chance accidents. Those things weren't meant to happen. They are the results of a fallen world.

They weren't, randomness and accident are not part of God's original intent for this world. Now, in this fallen world, we can't avoid those things, but God's people shouldn't add to the disorder and randomness of this world, but they should be people characterized by order and trustworthiness.

[12 : 54] And to remind them of that, God said that they must stay away from animals that weren't like that. So, the kinds of animals that move weirdly, right?

You know those animals that you see them and they freak you out because you don't know what they're going to do next. You know the kind of animal I'm talking about? The ones you want your husband to take out the house when you see them.

Okay, so mice, snakes, swarming things, yes, swarming insects. That's exactly what we see in Leviticus. Except, interestingly enough, there was an exception to those.

Locusts you could eat because them with grasshoppers as well, they hopped apparently in a more predictable way. They weren't just random swarming insects and so they could eat them, but I'm sure you would still want your husband to take out a locust if you saw it on the kitchen floor, right? But those kind of random moving animals are also listed here to be considered as unclean.

Because, to remind God's people, they are not to be people that contribute to the randomness and the disorder of creation.

[14 : 06] And then finally, the third category, were any animals associated with death? Because death is the result of the fall. It's not meant to be in God's good world.

It's not God's intent for this world. And so, birds of prey. Eagles, falcons, things like that. And land predators. And scavengers. Verse 13 to 14, you see the birds of prey.

Verse 27, you see the land predators. Okay, so that actually, those three categories pretty much explain all of the different animals that the Israelites had to consider as unclean.

And this was the basis of what we call the kosher Jewish diet, right? When you talk about Jews being kosher in their diet, it's based on Leviticus 11. But what we understand, actually, that the kosher diet was meant to be a daily reminder of God's intent for His world, which is a world with boundaries, with order, and with life.

And that His people are, therefore, to be distinct from anything opposite to boundaries and order and life. And the first way to remind them of that was in their daily eating.

[15:17] Okay, so, what does that mean for us? Does that mean no more ostrich bulton? Does that mean you're going to have to throw away your eel stew you were planning for lunch today?

And if you were, please invite me. Because I've had eel and I rather like it. No. The reason that these laws don't apply directly to us today is because Jesus came and changed all that.

And so the next thing we need to understand is how Jesus changed the menu. So, one of the big controversies in the early church, when after Jesus had come and died and risen and ascended, and the church began, one of the big problems in the early church was that the Gentile Christians, those who were not Jews who came to believe in Jesus, could eat whatever they want.

But the Jews who came to believe in Jesus, who had grown up with these food rules, struggled to eat with the Gentile Christians. And it was a big problem in the early church that they were obeying these food rules, but the Gentiles were eating pork and eel or whatever it is, and the Jews couldn't eat with them.

And that's why we read in Acts 10 earlier, God goes to Peter, who's one of the leaders of the early church, a Jewish guy, and he tells him with a vision three times that he can now eat all of that food he couldn't eat before.

[16:39] Let me read it to you again from Acts 10, from verse 11. 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 and birds. Then a voice told him, get up here to kill and eat. So this vision he had of all the animals he wasn't allowed to eat before, now God is saying to him, you can kill them and eat them, I give you permission to.

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

So God has changed the rules, and of course he can do that, right? And it's worth mentioning, even though he's saying kill animals and eat, we might go, that's not nice, we like animals.

And remember, this is a provision for a fallen world, that God gives permission to humans to eat animals. It's not ideal, it's not what God originally intended.

[17:50] There was never meant to be any kind of death, animal or human, but this is God's provision. And at this point in time, God removes these rules as to what they could or couldn't eat, what the Jews could or couldn't eat.

Now why does he do that? All of a sudden, in Acts 10. Why? Why does he change his mind? He said to these people, you can't eat these before, and now he says you can.

Is God vacillating? Is he changing his mind? No. It's because of what's just happened. What's just happened? Jesus can. Jesus died, Jesus rose, and Jesus ascended again.

Okay? And that changed everything. Because of what Jesus had achieved through his atoning death. By dying for the sins of anyone who trusts in him, that means that Jesus can now make anyone holy.

He can make anyone fit for God's presence. Think about that. I don't know what you think about yourself. Some people like themselves.

[18:57] Some people don't. But even you, no matter who you are, you can be made fit for the presence of God, the holy God, because of what Jesus has done on the cross.

No matter who you are, because of what Jesus has done for your sins, if you trust in him, he's washed them away, he's taken them completely, he's sanctified his people, he's made them holy and fit for God's presence.

That's what he achieved on the cross. Nothing less than that. And not only that, not only has he removed the penalty of sin for anyone who trusts in it, but this is amazing.

He gives them his very powerful Holy Spirit to live inside them, to give us a new power in our lives, a power to discern what is clean and unclean, really, to put off what doesn't belong in our life, so

that we no longer need the holiness rules to constantly remind us of it like the Jews did, because we've got God's very Spirit to teach us those things.

And that is why Jesus himself taught that the actual food, the actual menu was never the point.

[20 : 14] In fact, holiness was always the point. Let me read to you from Mark chapter 7 from verse 14. Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them. Verse 17, After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.

Are you so dull? he asked. Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? Let me just pause there. You see what he's saying to them? He's saying, The food rules you follow, guys, it was always meant to point to something else.

Don't think that the food actually defiles you. It was meant to point to something inwards. So, he goes on from verse 19. For it doesn't go into the heart, but into their stomach, and then is out of the body.

In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. He went on. What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come.

[21 : 28] Sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.

So, true holiness, Jesus is saying here, the life that is appropriate for God's presence, for relationship with God, is not about external rules.

It's not about what you're allowed to do, and what you're not allowed to do, what you're allowed to eat, or what you're not allowed to eat. That's not what Christianity is.

You know that? That might be a relief for some of you, who think that you come to church, and you're going to be told a whole bunch of rules. That's not what Christianity is about. So, just, that's the point that we need to get, from what Jesus is saying here.

Christianity is not about keeping the rules. It's not about what you're allowed to do, and what you're not allowed to do. Even though there's a lot of that in the Old Testament, it's always actually meant to point us to something deeper, something more important in our lives.

[22 : 39] That's not what Christianity is about. But, what is it about? Well, I'll tell you what Christianity is about. Christianity is about relying on Jesus as our Savior and our King, giving Him our lives because He came and saved us from our sin, and then letting Him change us from the inside out to make us fit for God's presence, to make us fit for eternity one day.

That is what Christianity is about. It's about changing, letting Him change us so that we can be fit to meet God one day. That's what Christianity is about.

And you know what that's called? The theologians call it, it's a word called sanctification. You may have heard it before. It's the process of sanctification in the life of a Christian.

And what that means is the slow but sure change in habits, and in what we think, and in what we desire, and in how we live and how we speak.

It's the slow but sure change that God does in His people in preparation to meet Him one day, in preparation to live in His presence in eternity and enjoy all the blessing and goodness and joy and life that there is to be found there.

[24 : 00] But first, we need to be made ready for that. That is why we're here at church. That is why we go to growth group. That is why we do what we do because we are helping each other to follow Jesus and to let Him change us and to spur each other on to those lives.

If you are ever going to really come close to God, if you're ever going to live in God's heavenly kingdom, you need His Holy Spirit to sanctify you, to make you fit for God, no one will be there one day who is not.

And so, if you see no signs of that in your life, if that transformation is not happening in you, you're probably not yet saved.

It's beholden on me as your pastor to warn you not to think you're a Christian, not to think you're saved if you're not. And evidence, over and over again in the Bible, evidence of true faith, true salvation, is an increasing, perceptible holiness in your life.

And that is a work that the Holy Spirit does in all who are truly saved. And it's a work that God does. He does it by His power.

[25 : 32] It's not by our efforts or power. But, we are called with God's power available to us to partner with Him in the work of growing in holiness.

And so, before we finish, I want us to consider what a holy diet looks like for us today. Right? We read in Leviticus 11 of the holy diet of the Israelites, which were all pointing forwards to this true holiness that God is calling us to, which is fulfilled in Jesus.

But that doesn't mean that we are not to pursue intentional holy lives today. In fact, that is exactly how God is going to sanctify us, through us obeying His Word to do these things.

Okay? So, what does a holy diet look like today? Well, this same Peter who saw this vision of all these animals that God gave him that he's allowed to eat now, later wrote a letter to a group of Christians.

It's in our Bible's 1 Peter. And he says this to them. 1 Peter, from verse 15 of chapter 1.

[26 : 41] You can just listen. But just as He who called you is holy, so you must be holy in all you do. For it is written, be holy because I am holy.

This is God speaking to His people. And Peter is saying that is just as true for Christians today as it was for Jews. God is saying, because I am holy and you're going to meet me one day, you've got to be holy too.

If we're ever going to live with God in eternity, we need to start living appropriately now. And that's what the Holy Spirit, if we have Him inside us through true faith, that's what He does in us.

But to do that, we also need to learn to distinguish daily what in our lives is clean and unclean. In other words, what is still not appropriate for the age to come, when we will see God, when we will live with God.

And whatever now in our lives is not appropriate for that, we need to get rid of. So think of it like this. Imagine you are packing your bags to emigrate to another country.

[27 : 46] Okay? You've decided to emigrate and you're moving your entire life to another country with a different culture and different customs and all things. Now you're packing your bags, right? Your bag is there lying on your bed, it's open, and you're packing and you're deciding what to take with you to this new country.

And there are certain things you won't take with you because they are not appropriate for where you're going. So currency from your old country that's not going to be used in your new country. Appliances with plugs or electrical systems that won't work in your new country. Clothes that are not appropriate to the new climate. And so you constantly, as you're packing, you're going to be asking the question with every item, does this belong where I'm going?

Well, you know what? Christians need to do the same as we look at our lives, we look at our habits, we look at our thought patterns, we need to get into the habit of asking, does this belong where I'm going? Does this way of thinking belong where I'm going?

Does this behavior belong where I'm going? Peter goes on in his letter, therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

[29 : 02] And then in chapter 3, he says, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble, do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.

On the contrary, repay evil with blessing because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. See what he's saying?

He's saying these are the qualities of the kingdom and if you're a Christian that's where you're going so you need to start living like that now. These are the qualities of the kingdom and if we are being transformed to live there, we should be nurturing and practicing those habits and those attitudes that are appropriate for where we are going and we should be actively getting rid of those things that are not.

You know, as a pastor, I'm often asked by people, they come to me and say, is such and such a sin? Is it a sin to do this? Or is it a sin to be involved in this?

Or is it a sin to say this? Because they want rules. It's easy if we have rules. Is it allowed or is it not allowed? So I try not to just categorize things as well that's a sin and that's not.

[30 : 15] Rather, I ask them the question, well, think about this. Does that belong where you're going? That's a really good question to ask if we're wondering about a particular habit of our life?

Ask yourself, does that belong where we're going? Does that belong in the kingdom? If not, get rid of it. Because we are preparing for eternity.

That's the only thing this life is about. What's the point of this life? What else are we meant to do here? We're going to grow old and die. The only thing that matters is preparing for eternity. And this is how we do it.

Through Jesus and His power. Does it belong where we're going? That's how our lives should be practiced that's how we should consider our thought patterns in our lives.

As Peter says, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. and you know, one of the most effective ways to do that, to rid ourselves of the things that are inappropriate in our lives, is by being very careful what we consume online.

[31 : 31] What we absorb from the world around us. What company we keep to actually be careful to do an audit of that and to ask what am I consuming?

What is being fed to me that is not appropriate for the age to come? Another function of these food laws in Leviticus 11 was to keep the Israelites separate from the pagan nations by not eating the same thing as they eat and in the same way, we've got to make sure we don't consume the same things as the world.

We've got to be careful and discerning of what we read, what we watch, who we follow online, what is being fed to us. You know, there's a reason on social media that it's called your feed.

You know what I mean? As you're sitting there late at night and you you don't feel like going to sleep so you death scroll. Oh, this looks interesting.

Another cat video. Oh, look at that. You death scroll. But you know what that's called? It's called your feed. It's what the world is feeding to you. And we've got to decide what we take in.

[32 : 50] You are what you eat. We've got to decide what we let get fed to us. And that's why we too must resist in our lives the things that these animals in Leviticus 11 symbolized.

Things that go against God's created boundaries and God's created purposes which we see all over today in today's world. The blurring of God's boundaries for gender and sex.

God has created boundaries for how we use sex in this world. world. And the first thing a sinful world does is try to cross those boundaries. Blurs the boundaries of gender.

Blurs the boundaries of sex. Sex outside of marriage where it was meant to have. And you know even some Christians think that that's okay. It's not. It's not consistent with the holy life because it crosses the boundaries that God has established for life.

and attitudes the animals also remind us of that promote disorder and conflict in our world and in our relationships rather than life and peace.

[33 : 55] Envy. Slander. Circles of gossip at school and in the office. Talking badly about other people. You know that's creating breakdown of relationships.

It's creating slander. Listening to people online who are attacking other people. Getting involved in those comment wars. That's creating, that's adding to the toxicity, it's adding to the disorder of the world.

You know gossiping about other people when they're not there with you. Oh but everyone does it. You know all the influencers online do it. Yeah well God's people don't do that.

We are called to something better than that. We are called to show God's original intent for this world to the broken world we live in.

And that means that holiness actually isn't about cutting ourselves off from the world and living in like these closed off communes. We are called to be salt and light in the world but we can only be that if we are distinct from it in how we live and how we speak and how we think are you.

[35 : 05] Well we become that way when the Holy Spirit starts to work in us and when we daily get into the habit of asking ourselves of our attitudes of our words of our thoughts does this belong where I'm going.

Let me end with one Peter he says this let's pray.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father you called us to be holy people and you give us all that we need and we thank you that it is not by our power that we become transformed but by your Holy Spirit working in all those who truly believe and we pray Lord that you would help us to obey what you've told us today that you would help us to put off those attitudes and those thoughts make us aware of those things Lord and make us willing to daily confess and repent of those things those things those attitudes and thoughts that are not appropriate for where we are going and help us daily to put on a new way of living in preparation for the age to come we pray this in Jesus name Amen