

COMMENTS ABOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT CEREMONIAL LAW

With a Focus on the Issue of...

Things that are "Common"
Contrasted with
Things that are "Set apart as special"

Introductory Comments

The Bible uses the idea of "common" in two ways. In a "positive" sense, the Bible describes the early Christians as having many things in *common*. They also *shared* things, as the need arose. They were all part of a common bond, since they had all followed the way of Jesus.

The Bible also uses this concept in a "negative" sense, often (not always) implying something undesirable. For instance, even though God's people have much in common among *themselves*, they are *not* to have anything in common with the ways of the Devil. Instead, they are to be the opposite, that is, *set apart* to God, and to doing what is good. In other words, they are to be *holy*.

The need to be holy ("set apart") is taught, symbolically, by many of the Jewish ceremonial regulations, found in the Old Testament Law. Unfortunately, the Jewish people often reduced holiness to the following of a list of *man-made* (not *God-made*) regulations, which they followed instead of God's Law. In both of these situations, whether following God's Law or man-made rules, the word "common" would carry the connotation of being unholy, unclean, or impure. But it would be an illegitimate concept, when it involved the man-made regulations. (Jesus himself strongly opposed the religious leaders' attempts to judge spirituality based on their own man-made rules. This is one of the reasons they wanted to kill him.)

This study focuses on the "negative" uses of the word "common," and is based on two related New Testament Greek words (*koinos* - adjective, and *koinoo* - verb). The places where these words occur in the outline will be in *italics*.

"COMMON" WITH THE CONNOTATION OF: UNCLEAN, UNHOLY

Used in this sense, being "common" is something to be *undesired*.

This section of the outline focuses on the use of the word in a way that is essentially the *opposite* of "special." It includes ideas such as:

- not cleaned-up (= dirty);
- not prepared for, or devoted to, a special purpose (= crude, vulgar);
- unclean, unholy, not special.

Within such a context, it would be desirable for a person to be "set apart (as special)." He would want to be "holy," rather than "common" (unclean, unholy, etc.).

A. The issue of God's rules vs. man-made rules

1. *The Jewish ceremonial regulations (from the Law given to Moses, by God)*

- These regulations were intended to be "examples" or "pictures" to teach people about holiness and other spiritual matters. The principles which were being illustrated would be applicable to all of life.
- The Jews were required to follow these regulations because of the covenant (agreement) they had made with God, to do so. Under the New Covenant, which Jesus established by his death and resurrection (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 8:6-13, etc.), observance of these regulations is no longer necessary (though not necessarily prohibited).
- These regulations were *never* intended to be a way of gaining or earning salvation. Nor were these ceremonial regulations ever intended to replace the spiritual realities they symbolically taught.

2. *In contrast... man-made rules*

- These regulations go beyond what God has said. They are additions to God's word - and often stand in opposition to it. God, however, forbids us to add to, or subtract from, his Word.
- The Jewish leaders came-up with their own rules and considered them to be equal to (or greater than) the ones that came from God. At times, they may have been invented with good intentions. But in the end, they actually resulted in nullifying (going against) God's requirements for the people. See Matthew 15:3 and Mark 7:6-8, which mention this.
- As far as the word "common" is concerned, if the issue involves man-made rules - human attempts to define or regulate spirituality - there is *no* genuine obligation to follow them. In these instances, the supposed "need" to be *set apart* (for obeying the rule) is a false perception, a mere human invention. [If a person wanted (by his own personal choice) to do what the rule said, and if the rule did not contradict Scripture,

and if the person knew that doing it did not "enhance" his spiritual condition - *then* it might be OK for him to do it.]

B. In reference to "common" food ("ceremonially unclean" or "not Kosher")

1. Romans 14:14 - No food is inherently (in itself) *ceremonially unclean* [common]. It is *ceremonially unclean* only to those who view it as being *unclean*. [In other words, it is not necessarily wrong to eat it. But if you yourself have chosen - or agreed - to view it as such (as the Jews had, under the Old Covenant), then it is wrong for you.]
2. Acts 10:14, 15; repeated in Acts 11:8, 9 - Peter: "I have never eaten anything that is *unholy* / *impure* [common] or not (ceremonially) cleaned." // God: "What I have made clean, don't call it *unholy* / *impure* [common]!" [In Christ, we are under a *new* covenant. These regulations are not a part of that covenant.]
 - o Additional comments: This event had a significance that went beyond the issue of *food*. Under the New Covenant, Peter needed to learn that *non-Jews* were no longer to be considered "unclean." [This issue is mentioned in greater detail, below.]
3. Note that the very same food could be either forbidden or permissible, depending on the circumstances surrounding it's use.
 - o It would be a sin to eat it under *either* of these conditions:
 - If the person is under an agreement to *not* eat it (as were those living under the Old Covenant ceremonial regulations).
 - If eating it would cause someone else to sin (such as a "weak" person who was in your presence, and who might be tempted to eat it, even though *he* considered it wrong to do so - see: 1 Corinthians 8:13 and its context).
 - o It would be completely acceptable for a person to eat it, if *both* of the following conditions were true:
 - If the person is *not* under any such agreement to not eat it (such as non-Jews, and Jews under the New Covenant), AND if the person is filled with gratitude to God for it (1 Timothy 4:3-4).
 - If both of these conditions are true, the food would be considered "clean" (in the sense of Acts 10:15). A person could still choose to *not* eat it (such as Jews under the New Covenant - Christian Jews - might choose to do), but this would be a voluntary decision. Such a person would not be sinning if he *did* eat it - as long as doing so did not cause anyone to sin (as mentioned above).
4. Note concerning the Ceremonial Law...
 - o Israel's agreement to not eat "common" (ceremonially unclean) food was made at Mt. Sinai, at the time that God gave Moses the Law.
 - o The Law contained great blessings, which the Jews were eager to have. Yet they often ignored the fact that with these blessings came responsibilities. Even when they did fulfill their responsibilities, they tended to do it superficially, at best, and often for the wrong reasons.
 - o The people had a constant tendency to forget the two greatest commands that were given to them:
 - Love for God. (The Jews often turned to false gods, or distorted the truth about the true God.)

- Love for their neighbors... which includes those who were often their enemies - the non-Jews. (The Jews frequently hated the non-Jews, and considered themselves superior to them.)
- These commands are more important than *all* the ceremonial obligations, combined. (This is the reason for such verses as: 1 Samuel 15:22 and Psalm 51:16-17.) In fact, these two commands are obligations that belong to *every person*, whether Jew or non-Jew.

C. In reference to "common" hands (not ceremonially washed)

1. Mark 7:2, 5 - The disciples were eating food with *unclean* [common] hands - that is, not ceremonially washed. // They were condemned by the religious leaders because they were eating food with *unclean* [common] hands.
 - Additional comments: This involved one of the religions leaders' man-made rules, rather than the commands of God. Jesus condemned the religious leaders for their hypocrisy, for they condemned the disciples for not following *man-made* regulations, while they themselves were violating *God-made* regulations. See the context that follows these verses, in Mark 7.

D. In reference to "common" people (those who were not "set apart" to God)

1. *Used to describe non-Jews, a view based on the Old Testament ceremonial law.* (The following verse stresses the fact that, under the New Covenant, this distinction would no longer be important.)
 - Acts 10:28 - [Referring to non-Jews] God says we are *not* to treat non-Jews as *unholy / impure* [common] or not clean. [Application of what God told Peter in v. 15. We are now under the New Covenant. Our lives are no longer regulated by the ceremonial regulations of the Old Covenant. We have a different focus, for in Christ, these distinctions (Jew vs. non-Jew) have no spiritual value.]
 - Additional Comments:
 - The Jews were "set apart" from other nations, because the true God had revealed himself to them. (This was not because of their own righteousness - which rarely existed - but because of promises God had made to their ancestors, who had trusted him.) The people of other nations - who, for the most part, worshiped false gods - would be described as "common" or "*not* set apart."
 - The Jews were to maintain a distinction between what was holy and what was "common" (not "set apart"). They were to make sure that they did not follow the ways of the pagan nations that surrounded them. They failed to do this, however, and were led into many horrible idolatrous practices. In the end, God had to replace their blessings with judgment.
 - All the "external" rituals - and even the activities of their daily lives - were intended to symbolically represent "internal" spiritual realities. But the Jews (as a group - there were individual exceptions) reduced these actions to mere rituals, and ignored their spiritual significance. In their hearts, they were no better than their godless (idolatrous) neighbors - though often they acted as though they

were superior to them. They rejected the ways of God... and God has rejected them - at least for the present time (Romans 11).

- Through Christ, the spiritual realities, which the majority of the Jews rejected, are now freely available to non-Jews. And so, those who were once "common" (*not* set apart to God) can now become "clean" and holy. Through Christ, the symbolic rituals, which belonged to the Jews, are no longer the focus. Rather, the spiritual realities become the focus, and the distinctions based on the symbols are done away with. In Christ, we are all one - all of us in which the spiritual reality has taken effect.

2. *Used to describe people who are not qualified to enter God's presence.* They are "common" (unholy) rather than "set apart" for God.

- THE SYMBOL: With reference to *ceremonial* "uncleanness" (part of the Jewish ceremonial law).
 - Hebrews 9:13 - The blood/ashes sprinkled on those who were *ceremonially unclean* [common]... made them ceremonially clean.
- THE REALITY: With reference to *spiritual* "uncleanness" (and its absence from the "Heavenly Jerusalem," from God's presence.)
 - Revelation 21:27 - Nothing (no person) *impure/unclean* [common] will enter the city.

E. In reference to "common" blood (= profane/unclean/of no value): Jesus' blood (= the blood which made the New Covenant a reality) was *wrongly* considered, by some, as being of no value.

1. Hebrews 10:29 - The person who treats it as *unholy* [as common, of no special significance] will be severely punished by God.

F. THE SPIRITUAL REALITY: Jesus focuses on the real source of "uncleanness" (etc.) - it does not revolve around physical rituals, but is related to the nature of the heart.

1. Matthew 15:11, 18, 20; Mark 7:15, 18, 20, 23 - All these verses have a similar focus: It's not what enters a person's mouth (food) that makes him *unclean/defiled*. Rather, it is what comes out of the mouth - the expressions of the heart - that make him *unclean/defiled*. [See the context of these verses, for a listing of some of the sins that come from the heart.]
 - Additional Comments: The religious leaders were focused on the issue of being ceremonially clean. Yet they themselves had distorted this concept and had replaced God's requirements with those of their own invention. They also focused on "external" actions, while ignoring "internal" spiritual realities. (See Mark 7:2, 5 - verses mentioned above, in Section C.) The verses in this section show the *real* reasons that people should be condemned as sinners: it involves matters of the heart, not of the stomach!