

DOES THE BIBLE PERMIT CHRISTIANS TO EAT “UNCLEAN” MEAT IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES?

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During the pre-Christian era, it is a well-known fact that God forbade the Israelites to eat certain types of animal flesh. While the Israelites frequently disobeyed God's instructions, it was quite clear that God's law prohibited the consumption of pork, shellfish and other types of animal flesh. Therefore, if a person ate "unclean" food in Old Testament times, it was because they were choosing to disobey God's instructions, not because they felt they had a divine authorization to consume such meats.

In the modern world, most Christians consume "unclean" meats not out of rebellion, but because of a belief that New Testament scriptures permit them to do so. The belief that Old Testament instructions on the consumption of animal flesh are no longer applicable is often referred to as "Christian liberty" (i.e. "freedom" from the "restrictions" of the Old Testament). This article will examine the subject of "unclean meats" from biblical and scientific viewpoints in an effort to determine what the "New Testament" Christian viewpoint on this subject should be. The answer will reveal whether modern Christians are (A) exercising "liberty" to eat unclean meats or (B) ignoring God's guidance on the subject.

In the Old Testament, the issue was clear: God said to avoid eating the flesh of certain animals. It is in New Testament times that the issue has become blurred. The Old Testament meat instructions are still found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 in our Bibles. Clearly, anyone who eats forbidden animal flesh is disobeying those scriptures. However, do they have the "liberty to do so as a result of New Testament scriptures? A deeper question is: if God really has abolished his Old Testament dietary laws, is there any empirical physical evidence to support that conclusion?

At Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses not only the Ten Commandments but also many divine instructions about personal behavior, methods of worship and lifestyle choices. These divine instructions came to be known as the "law of Moses" even though they were actually "the law of God given to Moses." When Jesus Christ lived his physical life, many often forget he was reared as a devout Jew. After Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary observed the seven-day purification period for women, and also had Jesus circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2:21-23), according to the instructions of the law of Moses in Leviticus 12:1-

3. These aspects of the Law of Moses are found literally adjacent to the chapter on dietary laws (Leviticus 11). Since Joseph and Mary scrupulously observed Leviticus 12 in rearing Jesus, it follows that they scrupulously observed Leviticus 11 in their choice of meats which were fed to Jesus and the rest of their children. The observant nature of Jesus' family is further confirmed in Luke 2:39: "And when they [Joseph and Mary] had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee." [Notice that Luke does not call these Old Testament requirements the "law of Moses," but refers to them as the "law of the Lord."—a subtle, but important indicator of the early Christian church's views about Old Testament laws.] Luke 2:41 adds that Joseph and Mary kept the Feast of Passover "every year" at Jerusalem. It is not clear whether they brought their children with them every year, but verse 42 states that they brought Jesus with them to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast when Jesus was twelve years old.

During his adult years, the scriptures portray Jesus as being loyal to the "observant" traditions of his parents. We know that Jesus was careful to observe the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 26:17-19), and that he participated in the "Last Great Day" of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:37). In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus openly declared his allegiance to the Old Testament Laws of God (i.e. "law of Moses"). He emphatically stated:

"think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill... Till heaven and earth pass, one jot [a dot of the i] or one tittle [a cross of the t] shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Whew! Jesus' affirmation that his coming will abolish "nothing" from the Old Testament laws of God ought to give all modern Christians pause about assuming Jesus made any major changes in the observance of the dietary laws. Two truisms of biblical study are as follows: (A) The words of God (in the Old Testament) and Jesus Christ (in the New Testament) carry more scriptural authority than the words of their human followers, and (B) one must interpret vague scriptures in light of the meaning of clear scriptures, not vice versa. Applying both these truisms, any vague passages in New Testament books must be interpreted in a manner consistent with the clear declaration of Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:17. Given the

vehemence of Jesus' support for God's Old Testament laws in Matthew 5:17-18, we must insist on finding very explicit evidence in the New Testament that something was "done away" before we abandon the practice. This is particularly true in the case of Paul's writings as Peter warned that Paul's writings were easy to misunderstand (II Peter 3:16). It is noteworthy that while God canonized many of Paul's writings, Peter's warning about their difficult doctrinal application was also canonized. If Paul's words were easily misunderstood **in his own time and in his own culture**, how much easier might it be for us to misunderstand Paul's writings when we not only read Paul's words in a different language but are also two millennia removed from his historical context?

Hebrews 13:8 tells us that Jesus Christ is:

"... the same yesterday, today and forever.

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines."

Here the writer of Hebrews warns against following false doctrines by reminding the reader that Jesus Christ's doctrines not only "did not change" but also "will never change." Does this scripture sound like Jesus Christ was one to radically alter the Old Testament laws of God? Quite the contrary, the scriptural evidence is that Jesus supported and practiced them faithfully during his entire life.

It is apparent that Jesus Christ and his disciples obeyed the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. The fact that there is no mention of any controversy about this point between Jesus and the Pharisees makes this evident. The Pharisees were **eagerly** looking for grounds to accuse Jesus on religious grounds to undermine his popularity with the masses. If Jesus (or his followers) had ever eaten unclean meats, the Pharisees would have made it one of their central accusations against him. Likewise, if the early New Testament church had eaten unclean meats, it would have been a "cause celebre" in the book of Acts. The fact that there were no controversies in the gospels about eating pork, shellfish, etc. argues that Jesus, his followers and the Pharisees were all in agreement on this matter. Paul's own defense to his Jewish accusers in Acts 22:3 and 23:1 ("I [was] taught according to the perfect manner **of the law of the fathers**... I have lived in good conscience before God until this day") also indicates that Paul had maintained a

devout obedience to the laws of God (which including the dietary laws throughout his life. Nowhere in the scriptures is Paul accused by his detractors of "eating unclean meats."

Having said the above, it needs to be acknowledged that some things **were** "done away with" in the New Testament. Clear scriptures record that the New Testament **did** abolish the need for animal sacrifices and the various rites associated with those sacrifices (Hebrews 9:9-15, 10:4). It is also clear that the requirement of physical circumcision was abolished (I Corinthians 7:19 Galatians 6:15). Some might say: "See, that means the whole law of Moses was abolished," but that is a recklessly broad claim. Since the Ten Commandments were part of the "law of Moses," an assertion that the whole "law of Moses" was "done away with" also asserts the Ten Commandments were "done away with." Does that mean Christians are now "free" to rob banks, lie, sleep with anyone they want to and murder at will?" Of course not! Paul himself expressed amazement that people had gotten the idea that New Testament faith "did away with" the laws of God. He wrote in Romans 3:31:

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

Therefore, we must carefully evaluate the scriptures to see what requirements really were "done away." Let us begin with the need for animal sacrifices and the rituals associated with them. In Jeremiah 7:22-24, God stated:

"For when I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I said nothing to them, gave no orders, about burnt offerings or sacrifices. My one command to them was this: Listen to my voice, then I will be your God and you shall be my people... but they did not listen." (New Jerusalem Bible)

God Himself stated that the sacrificial laws and rituals were **not** a part of his original laws given to Israel, but were added later because the Israelites did not obey him. Since they were not a part of God's original laws, their abolition in the New Testament does nothing to revoke the main body of God's laws. Paul also wrote in Galatians 3:19 that there was an Old Testament "law" which had been "added because of transgressions." Combining Galatians 3:19 with Jeremiah 7:22-24, it is apparent that the "law" that was "added" [to the original laws of God] was the "law" (or rules) about animal sacrifices. Paul did not abolish the

laws of God in any of his writings, as Romans 3:31 confirms.

Also, the rite of physical circumcision (which was no longer required in the New Testament) was not a part of the “**law of God**,” but was rather a “sign” of the Old Testament **covenant** between God and Israel. Even the Old Testament Hebrew prophets prophesied that the “Old Covenant” would eventually be replaced by a “new covenant” that would be **spiritual** in nature. Jeremiah 31:31 prophesied:

“Look, the days are coming, Yahweh declares, when I shall make a **new covenant** with the House of Israel (and the House of Judah), but **not like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I brought them... out of Egypt...** No, this is the covenant I shall make with the House of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares. Within them I shall plant my Law, writing it on their hearts.” (NJB)

Unlike the temporary covenant made at Sinai, the “New Covenant” would be “everlasting.” While the Old Covenant was a physical covenant (with physical circumcision as its sign), the New Covenant would be a spiritual covenant (with circumcision of the “heart” being its sign--Romans 2:28-29). This was foreshadowed in Deuteronomy 10:16 wherein God spoke of the “circumcision of the foreskin **of the heart**” as proof of a real attitude change. When the Old Covenant was replaced by the New Covenant, the sign of the Old Covenant (circumcision) became moot and unnecessary.

Many assume that “since the Old Covenant was abolished, the Old Testament laws of God were abolished as well.” This assumption is incorrect. The Old Covenant and the laws of God were separate entities. The Old Covenant was a compact between God and the 12 tribes of Israel that God would provide national blessings, wealth and power to them **if they obeyed his law**, and that progressively worse curses would befall the tribes of Israel **if they broke his laws**. As we know, both Israel and Judah broke this covenant with God, and received national curses culminating in their captivities and removal from the Promised Land. The New Covenant was prophesied (see Jeremiah 31:31 quoted above) as one which would “plant” or “write” the laws of God in the heart of a person. In other words, the Old Covenant failed to enable mankind to obey God’s laws, but **the New Covenant would enable mankind to obey God**

because it would internalize God’s laws within human hearts. Ezekiel 39:39 and Joel 2:28 prophesied that this would be done when God shared his own divine Spirit with mankind. This was fulfilled in the New Covenant process of repentance, baptism, the receiving of God’s Holy Spirit, and a lifelong process of submitting to it.

We saw earlier that Paul (in Romans 3:31) taught that the laws of God were “established,” not “done away” by the New Testament covenant based on faith. The Apostle John echoed Paul’s view in I John 3:24 and 5:3, which state (in the New Jerusalem Bible):

“Whoever keeps his commandments remains in God, and God in him...”

“This is what the love of God is: keeping his commandments. Nor are his commandments burdensome...”

It is clear that the early Apostles believed that God’s laws were unaffected by the replacement of the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. The New Testament scriptures cited above conclusively show that the abolition of the sacrificial rites, circumcision and the Old Covenant did not abolish the laws of God. There are other instructions of God in the Law of Moses which no longer are relevant today as they were given to regulate institutions in ancient Israel which no longer exist in modern Christian nations (for example: regulations on slavery in Leviticus 25:35-55). The important thing to remember is, given Jesus Christ’s statement that he did not come to abolish “the law,” the abolition or historical obsolescence of a specific biblical regulation **on how the law was implemented in ancient Israel** does not abolish the law of God itself.

New Testament Verses Misunderstood

Now let us address the “unclean meats” issue by examining the New Testament passages which are often understood to mean that the Old Testament dietary laws were abolished. The first is Colossians 2:20-22, which is cited below from the New Jerusalem Bible.

“If you have really died with Christ to the **principles of this world**, why do you still let rules dictate to you, as though you were still living in this world?-- ‘do not pick up this, do not eat that, do not touch the other,’ and all about things which perish even while they are being used--according to **merely human commandments and doctrines.**” (Emphasis added.)

Whatever Paul was referring to in his comment “do not eat that,” he was not referring to the divine laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Paul was arguing against “principles of **this world**” and “commandments and doctrines” which were “**merely human**.” Such human meat regulations could have been a secular rule in Colossae (a Gentile city with pagan gods and temples) that no meat be eaten unless it was first sacrificed to idols. Paul made it clear that he was discussing a **human** meat regulation known to his readers in Colossae, not the **divine** meat laws of the scriptures. This leads us to a second scripture to be considered, I Timothy 4:4, which states (in the NJB).

“Everything God has created is good, and no food is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving: **the Word of God** and prayer make it holy.” (Emphasis added.)

What makes a food “holy” and acceptable to eat? An attitude of thanksgiving, prayer and **the Word of God**. What was the “Word of God” for the early Christian church? The only “Word of God” at that time was the accepted canon of the Old Testament (i.e. “the Hebrew Bible”)! Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are the portions of “**the Word of God**” which lists the meats God approved for human consumption. Rather than permitting the consumption of unclean meats, Paul’s instructions to Timothy actually affirmed that food must have prior approval in the Word of God (the Old Testament) in order to be eaten. Therefore, in this passage, Paul is actually affirming the applicability of the Old Testament dietary laws.

By examining this passage in its overall context (I Timothy 4:1-4), we see that Paul was addressing the subject of enforced vegetarianism, not the subject of “unclean meats.” Paul warned that “in the latter times... some shall depart from the faith,” teaching false doctrines such as “... commanding to abstain from meats.” Paul countered that false teaching by saying that it is permissible to eat animal flesh as long as the meats were approved in the word of God.” **Now consider that I Timothy 4:4 is contained within a prophecy about the latter days (which many regard as our current modern times).** Interestingly, in our modern world we have vocal “animal rights” advocates (loosely associated with the New Age Movement) who noisily wish to impose vegetarianism on society, labeling the

consumption of animal flesh as some kind of “animal abuse.” **Paul was telling those living “in the latter times” that they should ignore those who say it is wrong or immoral to eat animal flesh.** Paul prophesied that people could continue to eat animal flesh in the latter days as long as the meats were “approved” for human consumption in God’s Word. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are those sections of the “word of God” known to Paul that specified what types of animal flesh were permitted by God for human consumption. **So this passage of I Timothy actually upheld Leviticus 11’s and Deuteronomy 14’s applicability for the New Testament (and latter day) Christian church!**

Portions of I Corinthians (chapter 8 and 10:14-33) are also taken by some to permit the eating of unclean meats. However, the eating of unclean meats is not the subject of these passages. In fact, Paul is discussing whether **any** meats can be consumed if they have been “offered to idols.” Paul makes this very clear in I Corinthians 8:1 and 4 in writing:

“Now about foods which have been dedicated to false gods... On the subject of eating foods dedicated to false gods...” (NJB)

There was evidently a difference of opinion on this subject in the Corinthian church. Some believed they had the “freedom” to eat such meats because they knew that non-existent “gods” could not “bless” anything. While Paul concedes that fact, he warns such Corinthians that they needed to be careful about where and what they ate lest they trouble or offend those with “weaker consciences.” Paul warned those “with knowledge” that it would be a sin to trouble another’s conscience in this matter so it would be preferable to avoid eating meats altogether in a public eating place associated with a false god’s temple (see 8:10) rather than risk troubling a “weak” brother’s conscience who might, by chance, witness this act of eating and be “offended.”

In I Corinthians 10:25 when Paul says “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles [meat market], that eat, asking no questions for conscience sake,” we must remember Paul was not addressing the subject of eating unclean meats, but rather the eating of meats sacrificed to idols (see 10:28). By lifting I Corinthians 10:25 out of its limited context, some assume Paul meant it was all right to eat any unclean meat sold in the marketplace. **Paul’s statement must be understood within its**

context: he was saying that people shouldn't bother asking whether a cut of meat was "sacrificed to idols" before buying it. Paul's other writings make it clear he did not sanction the eating of unclean meats by early Christians, so he was telling Corinthian church members it was best to not even ask whether their "clean" meats had been "blessed by idols" because if the issue was not brought up, it did not even have to be addressed.

We must also remember Paul was writing about this issue to converts living in a gentile, pagan city. This question would have been irrelevant in a Jewish community because the Jews would not have offered their meats to idols as part of their food preparation process. Paul's writings show that he is clearly wrestling with this issue: upholding the freedom to eat "clean" meats while ensuring that the greater need (for brethren not to offend each other in a matter of conscience) took precedence.

Peter's vision in Acts 10 is also cited as biblical sanction for eating unclean meats, but a literal reading of the text does not support that view. Peter had a vision (verses 9-16) in which he saw a sheet full of many animals whose flesh was "unclean" to eat. This sheet of unclean meat was offered to him **three times** with the words "kill and eat." In the vision, Peter refuses to do so with the words: "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." **[This statement affirms that it was the practice of the Apostles and the early New Testament Christian church to avoid eating unclean meats!]** In the vision, Peter is told "what God has made clean, you have no right to call profane (NJB)." Many assume this means God "cleansed" unclean food, but they neglect to read on to see if that assumption is correct. Verse 17 in the NJB says:

"Peter was still at a loss over the meaning of the vision he had seen, when the men sent by Cornelius arrived." (Emphasis added.)

Note that Peter himself did not attribute to his vision any meaning that God had cleansed unclean meats; he simply didn't know what it meant. He didn't have long to wait to determine the meaning as it became clear as soon the men sent by Cornelius arrived. Cornelius was a Gentile (a Roman officer) who had sent **three men** to Peter after receiving a vision of his own to do so. Peter quickly realized that his vision meant that he should not "call **any man** (not any meat) common

or unclean." Peter understood the unclean meat in the vision had a symbolic, not a literal, meaning).

The Jews of Peter's time (including Peter) were so Xenophobic that they avoided contact with Gentiles as much as possible, regarding them as "unclean" (as verse 28 confirms). Peter shared that Xenophobia (an appropriate modern term would be "racism"), and in all likelihood would not have accompanied these Gentiles unless God had revealed to him in the vision "not to treat any man as unclean" (a conclusion Peter reiterated in verse 34). Later, God gave the Holy Spirit to these Gentiles in the presence of Peter and his delegation. What was their reaction? Verse 45 states:

"Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were all astonished that... the Holy Spirit should be poured out on Gentiles too." (NJB)

The racism of the early Jewish converts was so strong that even though Peter and his group met with the Gentiles, there apparently was no chance that they would have baptized these Gentiles and accepted them into the church unless God had performed a miracle by giving them the Holy Spirit in the presence of Peter and his fellow Christian Jews. In verse 47, Peter further realized God had shown them it was also acceptable to baptize Gentiles into the faith. In chapter 11, some of Peter's Jewish friends argued with Peter about what he had done, but Peter retold the entire history of his vision and God's miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit to the previously--"unclean" Gentiles. The whole group then agreed with Peter's perception of his vision and the subsequent events. A careful evaluation of "Peter's vision" reveals that it contains no message permitting Christians to eat "unclean meat." Indeed, we have Peter's strong affirmation in Acts 10:14 that he had "never" eaten anything unclean. The whole purpose of the vision was to convince the early Jewish Christians to accept Gentile converts into the church.

Another passage sometimes cited to defend the eating of unclean meats is Matthew 15:11 wherein Jesus stated:

"What goes into the mouth does not make anyone unclean; it is what comes out of the mouth that makes someone unclean." (NJB)

When the verse is considered in its overall context, it becomes clear that Jesus isn't discussing the subject of eating meats at all. In verses 1-2, the Pharisees nit-picked Jesus by saying:

"Why do your disciples break away from the

tradition of the elders? **They eat without washing their hands.**"

Notice that the subject being discussed is not the eating of unclean meats, but rather why the disciples were not washing their hands according to the practices of the Pharisees ("the elders"). Jesus then snapped back at them in verses 3-6:

"Why do you break away from the commandments of God for the sake of your tradition... you have made God's word ineffective by means of your tradition." (NJB)

Jesus was telling the Pharisees that failure to observe all the ritualistic "Jewish traditions" was not a violation of God's law. He identified the Pharisees' subversion of God's law as the real transgression. In fact, Jesus was affirming the necessity of putting God's laws paramount above **any** tradition or requirement of **any** man or group of men. By the time Jesus concludes his denunciation against the "hypocritical" Pharisees with his statement in verse 10, it is clear that Jesus is stating that if some foreign particle (dust, a fleck of dirt, etc.) is accidentally eaten because of insufficient hand-washing, it was "no big deal." What really matters is what comes out of one's mouth (our words and speech) which indicates what is going on in our heart.

To summarize thus far, a careful examination of the scriptures indicates that the early New Testament church continued the Old Testament practice of observing the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. The words of Jesus Christ and Peter as well as the writings of Paul all support this conclusion. Before we examine physical, empirical evidence on this question, let us look closer at Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 to see what meats God actually permits for consumption and which he forbids us to eat.

Clean vs Unclean Meat

Besides giving the Israelites a list of which animals, fish and birds were "fit to eat," he also gave them general guidelines for recognizing those animals which would be acceptable to eat. In Leviticus 11:3 and Deuteronomy 14:6, God stated that any cud-chewing animal with parted hooves would be clean to eat. Deuteronomy 14:4-5 permits the consumption of cattle, sheep, oxen, the deer and antelope family, etc. This identifies such North American wildlife as Buffalo and Elk as "clean" to eat as well. Leviticus 11:4-8 lists such animals as camels, coneys (some margins say "rock badger"),

rabbits and pigs as being unfit to eat. Leviticus 11:29-31 lists "creeping things" (weasels, mice, rats, turtles, lizards, snails and moles) as being unfit to eat under God's instructions. Snakes, dogs, cats and alligators also fail to qualify as clean foods. Leviticus 11:27 identifies all four-footed animals with paws (bears, lions, tigers, etc.) as being unclean to eat.

Leviticus 11:9-12 states that all salt- and fresh-water fish may be eaten as long as they have "fins and scales". However, all shellfish, squid, frogs, octopi, etc. are identified as unclean for human consumption. Regarding birds, Leviticus 11:13-20 lists types of birds which are unclean for human consumption. Besides identifying birds of prey- and carrion-eaters as unclean, the Bible lists cormorants, swans, pelicans, storks, herons and bats as unclean to eat. [Bats "flying things" in the Bible's classification system.] Such birds as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, etc. are not on the "unclean" list, and are therefore "clean" meats. Surprisingly, verses 21-22 list locusts and grasshoppers as being "clean" meats, but all other insects are listed as unclean.

In Leviticus 11:43-47, God concludes his instructions on meats with these words:

"You shall not make ourselves abominable with any creeping thing... **neither shall you make yourselves unclean** with them that you should be defiled thereby. For I am the Lord your God: you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy... you shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. This is the law of the beasts... to make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten." (Emphasis added.)

God regarded humans to be "defiled" or "unclean" if they ate the flesh of "unclean" animals. He expected the Israelites to refrain from unclean meats to maintain a state of "holiness" in his sight. As noted earlier, the early New Testament church obeyed God's instructions in Leviticus 11. The Apostle Peter recoiled at the thought of eating unclean meats (Acts 10:14), and the Apostle Paul wrote that animal flesh had to be sanctified in "the Word of God" (Old Testament scriptures) before it could be eaten. Consider also Paul's instructions in II Corinthians 6:16-18. After commenting on the importance of being separate from the sinfulness of the world in verses 14-16, Paul writes (in the KJV):

“... for **you are the Temple of the living God**; as God hath said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people, Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate,’ saith the Lord, **‘and touch not the unclean thing**: and I will receive you, and will be a father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters.’” (Emphasis added.)

Interesting! While writing to a congregation in a Gentile community, Paul quotes God’s (Old Testament) instructions to “**touch not the unclean thing**” as part of a commentary on maintaining Christian holiness. In citing the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, Paul was likely referring to forbidden meats as “unclean things,” especially since his fellow Apostle, Peter, specifically used the word “unclean” to describe forbidden meats (Acts 10:14). Even as the Israelites were forbidden to eat unclean meats as part of their “holiness” obligation toward God, Paul told early Christians to also avoid “unclean things” as part of their “holiness” obligation toward God. In other words, Paul was telling Corinthian Christians they would be defiling their bodies (“the temple of the living God”) if they “touched unclean things.”

The above passage indicates that even Paul, the “apostle to the Gentiles,” affirmed that the animal meat restrictions of the Old Testament were binding on New Testament Christians. Somehow, this fact has been overlooked by virtually all of modern Christendom.

Follow Bible Dietary Laws Today?

Did God still expect Christians to obey his dietary restrictions even after the Christian church became more “Gentile” and less “Jewish” in later centuries? What about in our modern time? Do the meat restrictions matter to God any more? For our answer, let us consider God’s attitude on the subject as found in a prophecy about the latter day period preceding the return of Jesus Christ (or “the coming of the Lord” in Old Testament parlance.) Isaiah 66:15-16 introduces a prophecy about the time when “the Lord will come with fire... for by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord will be many.” [This directly parallels Revelation 19:11-21’s prophecy that the return of Jesus Christ will involve a bloody war in which Jesus’ heavenly army slays huge numbers of human armies who resist his rule.] Isaiah’s prophecy concludes in

verses 22-23 with millennial language about “a new heavens and a new earth,” and “all flesh” on earth coming to worship God. After this prophecy is introduced in verses 15-16, notice what is mentioned in verse 17 as one of humanity’s sins in the latter days which provokes God to anger.

“As for those... who eat the flesh of pigs, revolting things and rats: their deeds and thoughts will perish together, declares Yahweh.”

How many Christians realize that prophecy reveals that one of the sins which provokes God’s wrath in the latter days is mankind’s eating of pigs and other unclean meats? The answer is very few, indeed.

We have now examined scriptures confirming that God forbids and condemns the eating of unclean animal flesh in (A) the Old Testament period, (B) the early New Testament church, and (C) the latter-day time period as well. There are no scriptures in the New Testament which clearly permit Christians to eat unclean meats. The conclusion of the entire biblical discussion on this subject is that God still forbids the eating of “unclean meats.” What an affirmation of Malachi 3:6 wherein God states: “I change not,” and Hebrews 13:8 which states: “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today and for ever.”

The unmistakable biblical teaching is that those Christians who wish to obey God should abstain from eating the flesh of animals which are identified in the Bible as “unclean.”

So far, we have examined only biblical evidence of God’s position on unclean meats. However, if God made this physical world (as the Bible asserts), then we should also be able to see physical, empirical evidence that unclean meats are somehow harmful for human beings. Conversely, if God “purified unclean foods,” the physical world should reflect an absence of risk in consuming them. Therefore, let us examine physical evidence on the subject.

It is well known that the flesh of animals dubbed “unclean” for human consumption pose unique risks to humans who eat them. The Webster’s Dictionary definition of “trichinosis” states:

“a trichinal disease marked by fever, diarrhea, muscular pains, etc. and usually acquired by eating undercooked, infested pork.”

The Encyclopedia Americana adds this warning:

“Hogs may be infested by parasitic

roundworms called... (trichina), which are lodged in muscle tissue. The trichina can be transferred to humans if raw or inadequately cooked pork is ingested, and serious, sometimes fatal, illness may result...

There is more likelihood of pork being contaminated by trichina in the United States than in Europe. In Europe, hog carcasses are inspected microscopically for evidence... of trichina.” (Emphasis added.)

The Americana also states the following about trichinosis:

“The disease is worldwide, and **about 15% of the United States population is said to be infested**, although the majority of cases remain asymptomatic. **The degree of severity of the infection is believed to depend on the number of trichinae contained in the ingested pork...**

The mortality of symptomatic cases runs from 5 to 40%... Once the trichinae are encysted in muscle tissue they cannot be dislodged... Death is usually from cardiac or respiratory failure in the acute phase.” (Emphasis added.)

Interesting! In spite of widespread measures to protect the public from pork-related trichina infections, approximately “15%” of Americans have become “infested” anyway. Consider the Americana’s comments about shellfish poisoning:

“... any of a group of disorders that develop following the eating of oysters, clams and other shellfish harvested from polluted waters. **Nearly all the disorders are caused by disease organisms or the toxic substances ingested by the shellfish.** The disorders range from diseases such as cholera and infective hepatitis to attacks of diarrhea and vomiting caused by **unidentified organisms.**

“One of the most serious disorders in this group is paralytic shellfish poisoning associated with... **certain protozoa... that are eaten by shellfish.** (Emphasis added.)

In an adjacent article, the Americana defines “shellfish” as: “... aquatic shelled invertebrates, many of which are popular foods. See Clam, Crab, Crustacea... Lobster, Mollusk, Oyster, Shrimp, Snail and Slug.”

It is a well-established scientific fact that the flesh of pigs and shellfish pose special infection risks to humans. If 15% of Americans are infested with trichina as a direct result of eating pork, one wonders how many unexplained cases of “cardiac or respiratory” problems could be a result of

trichina infestations. One also wonders how many cases of unexplained diarrhea or vomiting attributed to mysterious “bugs” are actually caused by eating shellfish.

It is worth noting that while the health risks of eating pork and shellfish (forbidden meats according to the Bible) are so well-known that they deserve their own listing in encyclopedias, there are no such special diseases associated with biblical “clean meats.” It is, however, possible for clean meats to harm humans as well if animals are not properly fed, slaughtered or processed. Clean meats can also be harmful to eat if they have consumed toxic chemicals in their habitat (for example, otherwise “clean” fish can pose a health threat to humans if they have ingested mercury or other toxins in their habitat).

Whoever gave the Israelites the dietary laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 possessed scientific knowledge that mankind would not learn for three millennia! The laws of God specifically forbade the eating of those types of animal flesh which are now identified as being most likely to cause human diseases and death. This argues that the Bible is, indeed, the word of a Creator God whose revelations to mankind are given for the benefit of mankind. In forbidding unclean meats, God gave wise parental instructions to humans made in his image even as a loving human parent might say: “Don’t touch that hot stove” or “Don’t experiment with drugs.” When children harm themselves by foolishly disregarding parental “revelation,” parents often think “if only they had listened to me.” When God sees his human children harm themselves by disregarding his revelations, he must have a the same reaction.

No wonder God said in Deuteronomy 5:29-33:

“O that there were such a heart in them [the Israelites] that they would... keep all my commandments always, **that it might be well with them and with their children for ever!**

“you shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, **that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days...**” (Emphasis added.)

God didn’t give his laws to arbitrarily assert power over human beings. He gave his laws (including the meat laws) “that it might be well with them.”

While God didn’t reveal the scientific reasons for his meat commands, a scientific basis is easily

postulated. God's law generally forbids the consumption of (A) carrion-eaters, and (B) animals who kill other creatures for their food. Pigs, vultures, raptors, etc. are capable of eating (and thriving) on diseased or decaying flesh. Predatory animals (lions, raptors, etc.) often prey on the weak (and sometimes diseased) animals in the herds of prey animals. Regarding seafood, bottom-dwelling shellfish (clams, lobsters, oysters, etc.) eat decaying organic detritus which sinks to the seafloor. A common denominator of many "unclean" animals is that they can thrive on decaying and diseased flesh which would sicken or kill a human being. When humans eat carrion- or prey-eating animals, they are partaking of a "food chain" which includes things harmful to humans. A humorous modern motto on identifying "unclean" animals and birds might be: "if it eats roadkill, don't eat it."

While it is documented that unclean meats can pose "acute" risks to humans, mankind is very inventive in trying to find ways around God's laws. Even as the invention of birth control devices has lessened (but not eliminated) the unwanted pregnancy and venereal disease risks involved in fornication and adultery, mankind has invented food processing techniques to minimize the acute risks of catching diseases from unclean flesh. As proof of this, it is now uncommon in the western world to have acute trichinosis outbreaks.

However, are there chronic risks (not yet discovered) of eating unclean animal flesh? Even as we know a body can recover from a short exposure to cigarette smoke but long-term use of tobacco can be fatal, are there long-term risks in consuming unclean meats that are not yet known? We do know that our modern world (which eats large amounts of unclean meats) has developed many degenerative diseases, the causes of which are not well-understood. It may not be possible to conduct scientific tests on the chronic risks of eating unclean meats because the tests would literally have to span lifetimes, and people would have to practice the same meat-eating habits over those lifetimes before correlations could be made on which groups developed more degenerative diseases. However, this author believes that given the known short-term health risks of eating unclean meats, it is likely that eating unclean meats also poses long-term health risks which are not yet appreciated. God told the Israelites that they would be "blessed" and "prolong their days" if they

obeyed his laws (including the meat laws). Since Christ declared that God's laws were not "done away," this argues that if Christians obey God's laws on clean and unclean meats, it will lead to a healthier, longer life for them as well.

The Bible claims to be God's "instruction manual" for mankind, listing for mankind what is good and what is harmful in virtually every aspect of human lifestyle choices. When you buy a car, you receive an "instruction manual" with the car telling how it should be fueled, oiled, serviced and maintained if you want it "to have a healthy, long (mechanical) life." This instruction manual is the manufacturer's "revelation" to the owner. If these instructions are disregarded, bad things happen. So it is with mankind and our bodies. If we disregard God's "instruction manual" (The Bible), bad things happen. Therefore, it behooves us to know and obey God's instructions in the Bible, his revelation to us.

There is another powerful piece of empirical evidence that God's dietary laws are still in effect, although this particular piece of evidence does not directly involve meats. God's laws included many instructions about personal conduct with we now understand are important, scientifically-based sanitation and hygienic regulations. While the ancient Israelites could not have known the scientific basis for God's instructions, they were nevertheless "blessed" if they obeyed them.

These health-related regulations included quarantining the sick (Leviticus 13:1-46), either burning or washing the garments of sick people (Leviticus 13:47-59), and the thorough bathing of sick people before ending their quarantines (Leviticus 14:8-10). Leviticus 15 required thoroughly washing the garments of men and women with bodily discharges (including menstrual discharges). The "law of Moses" (which was really the "Law of God given to Moses") even required baths and clothes-washing of anyone who was spit upon by a sick person (verse 8), and called for the destruction or washing of cookware and eating utensils used by sick people (verse 12). Even touching the bedlinens of a person with a bodily discharge required attendants to wash themselves and their clothing (verse 21). Deuteronomy 23:13-14 required that latrines be located away from living quarters, and that excrement be promptly buried. Even the rites governing the animal sacrifices called for the prompt burning or burial of animal wastes and

tissues (Exodus 29:14, Leviticus 4:11).

All the above laws are easily recognized as scientifically-based instructions to prevent the spread of disease-causing bacteria. **What is profoundly significant is that these instructions were given three millennia before mankind attained sufficient skills to learn the scientific basis for God's regulations.** This is, again, powerful evidence that the Bible was authored by the Creator God as only a Creator God could have then understood the science of microbiology underlying these hygienic regulations. Whoever gave these regulations to Moses understood how the transmission of bodily fluids can spread diseases as many of the Levitical laws were designed to stop the spread of contaminated body fluids. Quarantines, prompt burial of fecal and animal-slaughter wastes, washing the clothing and cookware of the sick (as well as their attendants), and regular bathing of the human body are sound scientific principles to stop the spread of diseases.

Were God's hygienic laws "done away with" in New Testament times? Of course not! Modern science now knows that these laws of God are critically-necessary elements in maintaining proper hygiene in a hospital, community or home. Sadly, mankind has ignored these vital instructions of God for much of our existence on earth, and has suffered the consequences of innumerable disease epidemics as a result. Let us examine just one example.

While the early Christian church continued to observe God's laws (so much so that it was seen as a "Jewish" sect in the 1st century A.D.--Acts 28:22), by Medieval times Christianity had undergone a radical change from its early Apostolic roots. Collier's Encyclopedia states:

"The superstition and dogmatism that marked the rise of Christianity in Europe continued to flourish throughout the Middle Ages. As in Babylon, astrology ruled the prognosis... Hygiene and sanitation were at a very low level, since the human body was held in contempt. St. Jerome saw no reason for any baths after the baptism." 6

By universally rejecting the sanitary and hygienic rules of "the law of Moses," Medieval Europe was inviting disaster. It is even possible that Medieval Christians deliberately ignored these Old Testament laws in order to avoid "Judaizing." In the fourteenth century A.D., disaster struck Europe in the form of a pandemic known as the

Black Death. The Encyclopedia Americana records:

"The Black Death was bubonic plague or its more virulent relative, pneumonic plague... the plague bacillus was transmitted either by the fleas of black rats (bubonic) or by the infected wastes of its victims (pneumonic)... When the Black Death struck, Europe was completely helpless to combat it... standards of public health and personal hygiene were nearly non-existent... it is estimated that somewhere between one-quarter and one-third of Europe's population died in the years 1347-1350... Jews were accused of spreading the plague by poisoning wells, and pogroms directed against them occurred in the Rhineland and Switzerland.

Collier's Encyclopedia adds:

"By the end of 1350, two-thirds of all Europeans had been attacked, of whom about one-half died, a total of 25,000,000 deaths... More than half the population of London, and perhaps of all England, died... Plague ships drifted idly about with whole crews stricken.

This plague flourished in conditions of widespread disobedience to God's laws on sanitation and hygiene. If there had been widespread obedience to the Levitical laws requiring quarantines of the sick, the prompt burial of fecal wastes, the washing (or burning) of the clothes, eating utensils and bedlinens of the diseased, the Black Death plague would have been localized or prevented altogether because widespread sanitary conditions would have vastly lessened the numbers of disease-carrying rats.

Besides the casualties listed above, there were many more who died in subsequent outbreaks of the Plague during the next few centuries in Europe, and another 13,000,000 died of the plague when it spread to China in 1380.9 **Tens of millions of people died and tens of millions more suffered greatly because Medieval Christians mistakenly thought God's Old testament laws were "done away."** **Were God's Levitical laws on health and sanitation "done away?" Of course not! Their scientific applicability will last as long as the physical world does! (Does that remind us of Jesus' similar statement in Matthew 5:18?).** Millions of deaths across continents could have been prevented if only the people of the 14th century had been obedient to God's sanitation and hygiene laws. Is it any wonder God said in Hosea 4:6: "My people are destroyed for lack of

knowledge.” People tend to see God’s Old Testament laws as the burdensome requirements of an arbitrary god. What they fail to appreciate is that when God gave his laws to the Israelites, he was imparting to them priceless “insider information” about the workings of the physical world.

When it became known that the Black Death was sparing Jews (who were observing the Law of Moses), did Medieval society go to the Jews to try to learn the reasons why their neighborhoods were resistant to the plague? No, they superstitiously (and wrongly) blamed and persecuted the Jews for the plague!

What does all this have to do with the subject of unclean meats? Plenty. God’s sanitation and hygiene laws are part of the “law of Moses” and are found in the book of Leviticus alongside the laws about clean and unclean meats. If there was scientific evidence that the sanitation and hygiene laws of God were no longer applicable, we might infer that the meat restrictions were moot as well. However, the opposite is true. We know beyond any shadow of doubt that God’s Levitical sanitation and hygiene laws are still binding (Indeed, we now comprehend the compelling scientific reasons for their issuance). Consequently, it is logical to infer that God’s dietary restrictions are still in effect today as well. It is a well-established fact that pork and shellfish can pose acute health risks, and unclean meats such as these may also pose a long-term risk of degenerative diseases that will be better understood in the future. The sanitation and hygiene laws of God and the meat laws stand or fall together as they were both given at the same time by the same God of Israel to Moses at Sinai.

In summation, we have seen that there is no biblical basis for believing that the Old Testament dietary laws were “done away” in New Testament times. Indeed, we have seen that the early Apostolic church obeyed those meat laws, and several New Testament scriptures openly affirm the Levitical meat laws. Somewhere between the Apostolic church and the modern era, the Christian church stopped obeying God’s laws, probably because of a fear of “Judaizing” as there were edicts to persecute or kill those who did so. Many

millions of people have died in the last two millennia because the Christian church foolishly forsook God’s sanitation and hygiene laws. Who knows how many people have died (or suffered) because they ignored God’s laws regarding what meats are safe to eat. We now know God’s laws were based on scientific knowledge that was 3000 years ahead of mankind’s ability to discover or confirm their wisdom.

Let us conclude with an observation on our relationship with God. If we believe that God is an all-wise Creator as well as a loving Father, it logically follows that we should believe that his biblical instructions represent the wise instructions of a caring Father/Creator who wishes to guide his children into beneficial behaviors and away from destructive practices. Any human parent who restricts a child’s behavior by commanding them “Don’t play in the street” or “Don’t touch a hot stove” is displaying parental love. God’s instructions (and restrictions) are offered to us in that same spirit of parental love. So this issue also involves trust. Do we trust God to give us the wisest advise on a subject, or will we “lean unto our own understanding?” You, the reader, must now decide whether to eat “unclean meats” in the future. At least, you now have all the information you need on the subject to make an informed decision.

Endnotes

1. Webster’s New World Dictionary, Second Concise Edition, Avenel Books, 1975, see Heading “trichinosis,” p. 798
2. Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 22, 1988 Edition, see Heading entitled “Pork,” p. 416
3. *Ibid*, Vol. 27, see Heading “Trichinosis,” p. 99
4. *Ibid*, Vol. 24, see Heading entitled “Shellfish Poisoning,” p. 697
5. *Ibid*, see Heading entitled “Shellfish,” p. 697
6. Collier’s Encyclopedia, Vol. 13, 1957 Edition, see Heading entitled “Medicine--Medieval European Medicine,” p. 352
7. Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 4, 1988 Edition, see Heading entitled “Black Death,” pp. 29-30
8. Collier’s Encyclopedia, Vol. 3, 1957 Edition, see Heading entitled “Black Death,” p. 483
9. *Ibid*, p. 483

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