

## Clean and Unclean Food, From the Beginning of Creation

Presented By Your servant, Dan Baxley

[dan@servantsofyahshua.com](mailto:dan@servantsofyahshua.com)

[www.servantsofyahshua.com](http://www.servantsofyahshua.com)

*Does God forbid us certain meats, like pork, rabbit, oysters, clams,  
etc, etc...? rat ?*

The following is an article I lifted from the Internet expressing a balanced view that I share with the Writer, James McBride. I have added a few of my own comments at the end of the article.

## Are Some Meats Unfit To Eat?

By James McBride

Are the Old Testament dietary laws of clean and unclean meats out-dated? Should Christians eat pork and shell-fish? Is eating them unhealthy? Is eating them sin? Here's what God's Word has to say.

*James McBride:* Served a delicious-looking pork roast, or a plate of mussels or oysters, or a tasty ham sandwich - has it ever crossed your mind that there could be anything wrong in eating them? A strange question, perhaps, in a world where anything that moves is eaten somewhere! But it's one that sometimes puzzles Christians.

Sooner or later a Christian will encounter the Bible's "dietary laws". These are a list of meats which God instructed Israel not to eat, found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Do these "Old Testament" restrictions on what may be eaten apply to Christians today? Are they merely 'ceremonial' - and "done away in Christ"? Or is it still wrong to eat them?

Let's examine the evidence from Scripture - both Old and New Testament - to find God's mind on these questions. Many Christian writers claim that certain New Testament texts annul the original food laws, making them obsolete. Others argue that these laws continue to this day. Later we will look at the opposing views.

The food laws, of course, are in Scripture linked to the so-called "laws of uncleanness". 'Clean' animals were suitable for both sacrifice, and for food. The 'unclean' were prohibited for both. But were these laws of uncleanness first introduced by Moses?

Before The Flood

It's important to realize that these laws of uncleanness did not originate with "the Law of Moses" around 1500 B.C. They are not 'Jewish' but an inheritance for all mankind. In fact, they were known to Noah eight hundred years before Moses! Read Genesis 7:1-5: "Take with you [into the ark]" God instructed Noah, "seven of every kind of clean animal ... and two of every kind of unclean animal". That is, before the Flood the notion of "clean and unclean" was already understood. From the early dawn of history a clear distinction is made. Some creatures were "clean". Some were not. Some were for eating and some were not. Some animals were defined by the Creator as suitable for sacrifice, and some were not.

Abel sacrificed "the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" (Gen 4:4) and - as with many of the types of sacrifice - it's likely that he would have eaten a portion of it as part of the "sacrificial fellowship" with God. These sacrifices were of the 'clean' animals only.

From the Flood until Moses, then, the people of God are recorded as eating and sacrificing only the clean animals: of the 'flock' - sheep or goat - (Gen 4:4), or cattle (18:7f), or birds. Noah, after the Flood "took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl and offered burnt offerings" (8:20). It's logical that, as in later times, these sacrificial foods were also those designed to be eaten.

Within the dietary laws Noah was warned only that he should not eat flesh - with the blood still in it. A caution, this, with which any modern dietician would agree!

Moses later recorded for us what these clean and unclean animals, fish, birds and insects are. They have not changed since! However, in a few instances there

may be some doubt as to which creature is referred to, though those foods normally used as food are clearly defined.

ABRIDGED LIST OF SCRIPTURALLY "CLEAN" FOODS:

[see Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14]

MEAT:

*They chew the cud & have a divided hoof*

Beef

Antelope

Elk

Buffalo

Lamb

Deer

Goat

FISH:

*They must have both fins and scales*

Cod

Haddock

Mackerel

Salmon

Bream

Tuna

FOWL:

Chicken

Turkey

Quail

Pheasant

Goose

Grouse

Duck

Dove (and related)

Insects: Those listed in Scripture are not easily identified with our familiar insects. But you could, with John the Baptist, *try locusts*. [see Leviticus 11:20-23.] Modern outdoorsmen warn, however, to carefully inspect the locusts for parasites before ingesting!

### Merely Ceremonial?

It's well-known - even in our world of hi-tech refrigeration and high standards of hygienic food-handling - that certain foods are likely to cause illness. High on the list of meat with a medical health warning are the so-called "unclean" foods listed in Scripture! This does not mean that other meats are automatically safe. 'Mad Cow Disease', caused by forcing cows to be carnivores, is an example of how humans can turn the edible into the inedible. Humans, however, can never treat the inedible as edible without the risk of dire consequences. As I write, ninety people locally are seriously ill because of eating mussels - a kind of scavenger shell-fish that delightedly feeds on raw sewage! In 1990, and again several times since, shell-fish from the east coast of England were banned from the shops for several months because they were contaminated. Such incidents are not uncommon. Not infrequently they kill. And doctors, of course, frequently prescribe "no pork" to patients for health reasons. Another example is the hare which was, even among the ancient Britons, avoided because of its well-known loathsome disorders!

In the Middle Ages, Jews were accused of sorcery because they escaped many of the sicknesses that afflicted others. It is now known that this was because they observed the laws of "cleanness". The laws of uncleanness also include other (obvious to us) instructions such as avoiding contact with blood, contaminated water, skin diseases, rats and fleas, and not touching dead bodies.

So anyone who expresses respect for these Bible laws is doing himself a favor! Isn't it logical that a God who created man, who loves mankind, will also have given guidance on the best "fuel" for his body? And what to avoid?

In fact, an open-minded study of Scripture forces only one answer to our title question: Yes - some meats are unfit to eat! And Christians especially, in whom dwells the Spirit of God, who are His "Temple", who are Christ's Body, ought to give heed to the Bible's dietary laws!

### **The Penalty for Breaking the Laws of Clean and Unclean**

Obviously somebody has to touch dead bodies, clean up blood after a traffic accident, and treat patients with skin diseases. Breaking the cleanness laws is not automatically a sin, but there are penalties. In ancient times, the usual penalty was that you became "unclean until sunset." This meant that you were not allowed to enter the Temple that day. This was not a severe penalty, unless you were a priest on duty. This is probably one of the rationalizations that the priest used in the parable of the Good Samaritan when he "passed by on the other side." So uncleanness was a short term inconvenience. However, we can now see that there are also long-term penalties not mentioned in the Bible. For instance touching HIV-infected blood is a major hazard for medical personal.

Of course, it's almost impossible in today's world to avoid the intake of what are known as "unclean meats". Clearly, to unknowingly eat a portion of pork roast, or swallow a shrimp with the soup or down a prawn won't exclude us from the Kingdom of God. We are not saved by our works! Nor need we sift every spoonful of soup for particles of pork fat, nor minutely inspect every lettuce leaf for a maggot, nor wonder what's in the toothpaste! Wrote Paul, "For the Kingdom of God does not consist in eating and drinking..." (Romans 14:17).

The questions are: "What if we deliberately decide to break the Cleanness laws as a rejection of Scripture?" Now we are not talking about accident or ignorance or necessity. We are talking about refusing to follow clear instructions in the Bible.

### **Consequences**

Before God created man (the pinnacle and purpose of the material creation) He made His creation fitted to man's physical and psychic constitution. Man fits perfectly into the grand scheme of the fundamental laws of the Universe. That

'set-up' includes gravity, the laws of motion etc. Man to survive has to conform to these laws!

In Eden, man's diet - perhaps for environmental considerations - was largely vegetarian (Genesis 1:29-30). But because of sin, the ensuing disruption to the seasons and the curse on agriculture (ch. 3:17-19), certain plants were, or became, inedible. Hence there is today a wide range of plants which experience shows are unfit to eat - or even poisonous. Some mushrooms, for example are notoriously deadly. Since there is no doubt about these, there has been no need for God to give us special instructions. Similarly - and not quite so clear through our experience - certain animals are not fit to eat. To help us, God has identified these for us in His dietary laws.

To transgress the laws of gravity or inertia may land you in hospital - from a road accident, for example, or falling down stairs. But it doesn't deprive you of eternal life. It is not a sin that necessarily has spiritual consequences! This is, too, the case with the eating of 'unclean' meats. There are well-documented physical consequences (including heart disease, cancer, food poisoning, etc.). But their inadvertent ingestion doesn't lead to the second death. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians "There is nothing unclean [common] of itself" (ch. 14:14).

In other words, to eat unclean foods has consequences for our health. But it is not - usually - sin!

On the other hand it's also emphasized in Scripture that God gives the Holy Spirit (without which we are not Christ's) to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). To deliberately and knowingly flout any part of the Law of God instills and encourages an attitude of rebellion which could lead to the quenching from within us of the Spirit of God. That has real spiritual consequences! A true Christian constantly says to God "Your will be done"! Whether it hurts or not. God works with those who "tremble" at His Word!

## **Idolatry**

Why, then, do so many who claim to be Christian get so angry about this part of God's revelation to man?

Desperately, they search for Bible texts to somehow "get round" God's instruction! For example, Paul's words within his short treatise on idolatry (in I Corinthians 10) are used to justify, eating unclean foods when eating out. He said "If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising questions of conscience" (v.27). There you have it! You wouldn't want to embarrass your host (never mind yourself), would you? So with a clear conscience should you just tuck into the juicy pork chop - or the grilled octopus, or frogs legs, or barbecued rat, mouse, snake or dog? (All are

relished somewhere in the world!). But, with his avowed attitude of deep respect for God's Law, would Paul sanction this major departure from it? He did say, you will recall, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

What is Paul talking about? Look at the context. He nowhere implies that he is discussing health implications of unclean meat. He is discussing the religious implications of eating "clean" meats sacrificed to idols - idolatry - that is, any religion divorced from the Word of God. In Paul's times, the Temples were also the slaughterhouses, and it was difficult to find meat from animals not slaughtered in some religious ritual.

Notice his words: "Anything that is sold in the market eat, and ask no questions for conscience sake. If an unbeliever invites you [for dinner!] and you consent to go, eat whatever is put before you. And ask no questions for conscience sake [but, of course, you can ask questions for health sake, and many already do: low sodium diets, fat-free diets, allergies etc.]. But if anyone tells you, 'This food has been offered in sacrifice', abstain from eating it for the sake of him who warned you, and for conscience sake - I mean his conscience, not your own" (v. 25-28). Best to courteously warn your host ahead of time as to your food preferences - just as the Queen of England does!

Remember that the apostle Paul was writing to Christians whose sole "Scripture" was what we term the Old Testament! His teaching to the Corinthian Church was founded on the writings of the Old Testament. They were thoroughly familiar with the division of food into "clean and unclean"! As Paul wrote to Timothy: "Cling to the truths that you have learned and of which you are convinced, knowing who your teachers were, and that from infancy you have known the sacred writings which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

With their respect for the Old Testament they would take some convincing that Paul was telling them to flaunt God's Laws! Especially, too, in view of Jesus' attitude to God's Law - "I have not come to abolish [the Law and the Prophets]..." (Matthew 5:17). Anyway, in thirty-five odd years of keeping these food laws I have yet to meet anyone who told me the roast that we were about to eat - clean or unclean - was part of a sacrifice to idols. Nor, I bet, have you!

### **Peter's Dilemma**

The apostle Peter once faced a dilemma on this matter of clean and unclean. Some ten years after the resurrection of Jesus he had a vision of "all kinds of quadrupeds. Reptiles and birds" - dogs, cats, horses, frogs, alligators, snakes, spiders etc - being lowered before him in a huge sheet. A voice said "Rise, Peter, kill and eat". A shocking command. For as Peter makes clear:

"On no account, Lord, for I have never yet [this was, remember, ten years after the resurrection!] eaten anything unhallowed or unclean". (You can read the account in Acts 10.)

Peter knew the vision could not relate to food, so he was perplexed, but, as events unfolded, Peter came to understand the point of the vision: all men are equal in the eyes of God. Regarding salvation, there is neither Jew nor Gentile (vv.28-29). Peter was not to consider any man (Gk: *anthropos*) "unclean"! He did not say "any thing". In the vision God was telling him that salvation is open to all men. The vision had nothing to do with food!

To make these unclean foods suitable for mankind to eat, their - or man's - very anatomy and physiology would need restructuring. The digestive tracts of dogs and rats and pigs and oysters and crabs and vultures would have to be totally changed to properly process their flesh to be fit for human consumption. Yet all these unclean creatures are the same today as they were thousands years ago when the cleanness laws were written down! Where, in Scripture, has God 'cleansed' - indeed changed the very nature of - His long list of prohibited foods?

### **Holy Meat?**

Indeed Paul told Timothy that in our day "some will fall away from the truth, giving heed to deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons" (I Timothy 4:1). That's a strong warning - and surely one we ought to investigate! What is he referring to? "They insist on abstinence from foods which God has created to be partaken of with thankfulness by those who believe and know the truth". Clearly some of the brethren were listening to a false teaching of avoiding certain foods which are acceptable in God's eyes for man to eat. But which? He explains: "for it is made holy by the Word of God [the 'truth'] and by prayer" (v.5).

Now, what foods are "made holy" - that is, separated for a particular use - by the Scriptures, the Word of God? There's basically only one place to look - and that is Leviticus 11, repeated in Deuteronomy 14! In other words, the "clean" foods. Paul specifically points out that certain substances, defined by God's Word, are set apart for use as food. Some are not. So around 60 A.D., almost 30 years after Christ's resurrection, the apostle Paul still hadn't got the message that Jesus had "made all meats clean"!

Note that Paul calls the false teaching demonic. It is today a well-known tenet of the Satan-inspired "New Age" teachings that "all animated life is sacred". The extension of this is that God dwells in all creatures - and we ought therefore, for this reason, to eat only vegetable foods. It is, of course, a Satanic lie! One result, for example, is the populous nation of India, where poverty and malnutrition is widespread largely due to the refusal to kill vermin such as rats and mice - which in consequence devour half the stored grain - or to use cattle for food. Any of

those creatures, it is believed, might be re-incarnated people, or gods! This false concept is beginning to grip western society!

### **Did Jesus Change Animal Nature?**

But didn't Jesus "make all foods clean"? This is "quoted" from Mark 7:19 and is often taken to mean that Jesus overturned the Bible dietary laws.

Recall that Jesus constantly upheld the Law of God! But he did, of course, have something to say about "uncleanness". He blasted Pharisees for their obsessive pre-occupation with ritually washing the objects they used daily. However, to use this text in Mark 7 to prove that at that precise moment Jesus took it on himself to a) change the nature of animals, or b) change the human digestive system, and to c) forever after do away with God's perfect Laws is a travesty of Scripture!

Let's read the passage: "And he said to them. Are you also still ignorant? Do you not perceive that what enters into the man from without cannot pollute him? Because it does not reach the intellect [KJV 'heart'] but passes into the bowels: which eliminate all foods [KJV: 'purging all meats']". Late glosses on the text interpreted these words as "This said Jesus, making all meats clean". But even this statement is only saying "making all food clean" - i.e., a bit of mud does not make clean meat unclean. The conversation with the Pharisees involved only their concern with the cleanliness of otherwise clean meats.

The logical meaning of Jesus's statement is in connection with the digestion of food in the human body. Notice the view of W. Walsham How in his *Commentary*: "'Purging all meats' - That is, cleansing the foods eaten from all that is not suitable for nourishment". It is a physiological statement as true today as two thousand years ago! The human digestive system eliminates all unwanted roughage, etc.

Jesus, in this passage, goes on to show that the true uncleanness or pollution is "from within, from man's intellect": from vile thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, theft, avarice, wickedness, deceit, etc. (vv. 21-23). In other words, man is 'unclean' by breaking the Laws of God.

We have seen, then, that right from man's earliest days there is a God-inspired distinction between meats that are edible as food and those that aren't. Indeed in a prophecy for our time at the end of this age (v. 15) Isaiah relays God's message: "On the whole world the Eternal will pass sentence with his fire and sword. Any who ... eat the flesh of swine, of mice and crawling vermin, their rites and devices shall perish by the Eternal's order" (Isaiah 66:15-18 Moffatt).

Clearly God still holds the eating of unclean flesh as an abomination! Anciently God's Temple was desecrated by the sacrifice of an unclean animal on the altar. Very soon there will be a Temple (of some sort) again standing in Jerusalem.

Again that Temple will be desecrated. Is it possible that the coming Antichrist will enforce the ritual eating of swine's flesh? That once again God's altar will be defiled by the sacrifice of a pig upon it? That a required part of the coming universal religion will be the eating of "the abomination"? If so, then it will surely be Sin to eat the unclean!

However, in the new Temple which the returned Jesus Christ will construct, all the sacrificial animals conform to the Laws of Clean and Unclean (Ezekiel 43 etc). An instruction to the Priests and Levites who will officiate in those days in the future is "They must teach the people the difference between what is sacred and what is unconsecrated [i.e., ritually], and show them how to distinguish what is unclean and what is clean" [i.e., inherently] (ch. 44:23). The former refers to sacrifices, the latter to food.

This is precisely what we in the Churches of God teach and practice now.

James McBride

-- Thank you James --

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[Clean & Unclean Meats Part 2](#)