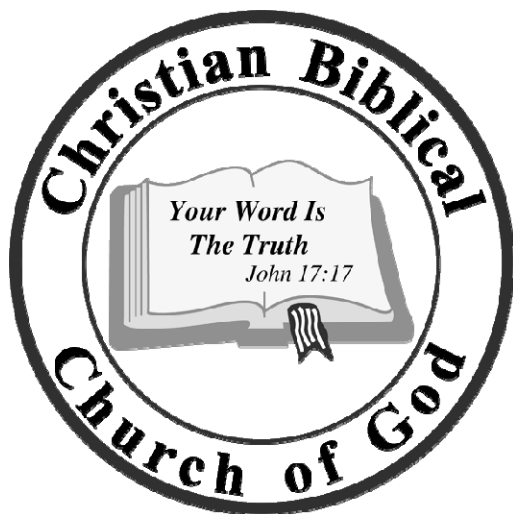


*What the Bible Teaches
About
“Clean” and “Unclean”
Meats*



*by
Philip Neal*

**Are the Old Testament dietary laws
of “clean” and “unclean” meats obsolete?
Should Christians eat pork and shellfish?
Is the issue a matter of *ritual* or *health*?
Could eating unclean meats be a sin?
Here’s what God’s Word has to say.**

*Copyright 2012, 2014
Christian Biblical Church of God
P.O Box 1442
Hollister, CA 95024-1442*

www.cbcg.org
www.churchathome.org
www.theoriginalbiblerestored.org
www.afaithfulversion.org

May be freely copied with full credit given to author and copyright holder.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
<i>Chapter One</i> Laws of “Clean” and “Unclean” Meats— Ordained for a <i>Holy</i> People	3
<i>Chapter Two</i> God’s Food Laws—Designed to Protect His People	7
<i>Chapter Three</i> The Dangers of Unclean Meats— A Medical Perspective	14
<i>Chapter Four</i> Are Biblical Food Laws Relevant For Christians Today?	23
<i>Conclusion</i>	33
Notes	34

Introduction

At the completion of the first six days of the “creation week,” the Creator God reviewed all of His handiwork and proclaimed that *everything* He had made was “*exceedingly good*” (Gen. 1:31). Indeed, everything had its set place and purpose in God’s grand design. But what about certain animals classified as “unclean” in Scripture—how could they be “good” while being *forbidden* as food? (See Gen. 7:2, 8; 8:20; Lev. 11; Deut. 14.)

Admittedly, most people enjoy eating pork, catfish, oysters, shrimp, and other meats described in Scripture as “unclean.” And yet, for the most part, they seem to experience no *immediate* adverse effects when they do so. This becomes “proof-positive” that such foods are actually “safe” to eat. But what about *long-term* adverse effects? Are such people playing dangerous games with their health? Why is it that even some *doctors* will not eat pork, the “other white meat”? What do they know about such foods that most people don’t?

For many, modern cooking methods and refrigeration make the whole subject of “unclean foods” rather moot. They rationalize: “Medical science would warn us if pork was unsafe to eat!” But medical science has a vacillating record when it comes to educating the public on healthy dietary choices. Just look at our ongoing overuse of refined sugar and the growing epidemic of diabetes; medical science has utterly failed to make a significant difference. Can we really trust medical science to protect us from the dangers of “unclean meats”? Ultimately, *we* are responsible for making informed decisions about our diet.

Many Christians are confused on this subject. Why *are* some animals considered “unclean” in Scripture—*forbidden* for use as food? Is the prohibition only a matter of ceremonial importance, or is eating “unclean” meat actually *harmful* to one’s health? What does the Bible *really* teach about “clean and unclean” meats?

Most churchgoers believe the Old Testament laws of “clean and unclean” foods are no longer applicable. They are considered a *relic* of past ages—obsolete for today’s Christian. After all, didn’t the apostle Paul pronounce that every creature is *good* and “not to be refused”? In Mark 7:19, didn’t Jesus declare all meats to be “clean”? What is the correct understanding of these and similar New Testament passages? (As we will see later, the *New International Version* spuriously adds the phrase “Jesus declared all foods *clean*” to Mark’s account. **Yet no such phrase exists in the**

Introduction

original Greek text. This *inserted phrase* has been a massive stumbling block for mainstream Christians regarding this subject.)

As a loving Father, it is not God's desire to deny mankind anything that is good, profitable, or that would bring godly joy and happiness. Indeed, it is God's heartfelt desire for all to be in health and prosper (III John 2), and to live abundantly (John 10:10). Because of His tremendous love for us, God has *forbidden* that certain animal meats be consumed by His people—as they represent very significant health risks!

Chapter One

Laws of “Clean” and “Unclean” Meats— Ordained for a *Holy* People

When God established the ancient nation of Israel, His desire was that they be a *holy* people. Naturally, this status would require their avoidance of certain foods deemed “unclean.” But why? What does one’s *diet* have to do with being *holy*?

In the Old Testament, the word *holy* comes from a Hebrew root that means to be “set apart.” Being *holy*, then, means being *dedicated* or set apart by God for a *special use*. Indeed, Israel was to be *different* from the nations around them in numerous special ways. Ultimately, Israel was *set apart* as God’s premier nation, to serve as a “model” for all the world to follow. Shortly after their exodus from Egypt, God began to reveal His great purpose for the nation: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. And **you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**” (Ex. 19:4-6). Later, in Deuteronomy, God says of Israel: “For you *are* a **holy people** to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has **chosen you to be a special people to Himself above all people** that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6).

The children of Israel were to obey and look to God alone; in turn, God would protect and prosper them in the sight of the nations. Ostensibly, in due time, the nations would be *drawn* to God’s “model nation”—seeking out their own relationship with the God of Israel. Notice how important it was that Israel set a right example before the nations. Moses wrote: “And you shall keep and do [all of the commandments and statutes of the Book of the Law], for this is your wisdom and your understanding **in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes** and say, ‘Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.’ For what nation is so great whose God *is* so near to them, as the LORD our God *is*, whenever we call upon Him? And what great nation has statutes and judgments that *are so* righteous as all this law which I set before you today?” (Deut. 4:6-8).

Chapter One

Unfortunately, Israel did not live up to their high calling, setting instead a dismal example before the nations. However, in the age to come, Israel will *fully* succeed in being God’s model nation (Zech. 8:23; Rom. 1:16).

It was God’s desire to *set Israel apart* through three means:

1) All Israelite males would take on the *sign* of the Abrahamic covenant (which formed the foundation of the Old Covenant)—*circumcision* (Gen. 17). No other peoples would, as a rule, practice this highly symbolic rite.

2) Israel would be set apart from the nations through the keeping of the seventh-day *Sabbath*, which served as an identifying *sign* between God and His chosen people (Ex. 16; 31). The biblical Passover and annual holy days also served to identify Israel as God’s nation (Lev. 23).

3) While other nations of the world ate whatever appealed to them, Israel would also be set apart through the avoidance of certain meats declared by God to be *unclean*. These unclean meats were simply *never intended* to be eaten—by anyone. God created *some* animal flesh to be consumed, while others were to be avoided due to their dangerous effects on human health. Various disease-causing aspects of eating unclean meats will be explored in a later chapter.

God also prohibited the consumption of the *fat* and *blood* of clean animals. Noah, for example, was commanded: “But you shall not eat of [clean] flesh with the life in it—*which is its blood*” (Gen. 9:4). Later, Moses gave this instruction from God: “*It shall be a statute forever for your generations throughout all your dwellings that you eat neither fat nor blood*” (Lev. 3:17). The concept that the *blood* of an animal contained its *life* was particularly important. “I will set My face against that soul who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people, for **the life of the flesh is in the blood**. And I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for yourselves; for it *is* the blood that makes an atonement for life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘**No one among you shall eat blood**, neither shall any stranger that is staying among you eat blood.’ And any man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that are living among you, who hunts game, beast or fowl that may be eaten, he shall even pour out its blood and cover it with dust; for *it is* the life of all flesh...” (Lev. 17:10-14). In New Testament times, the apostles made it clear that blood was not to be consumed (Acts 15:20, 29).

Obviously, God could have created every animal as clean, fit for human consumption. In His infinite wisdom,

Laws of “Clean” and “Unclean” Meats—Ordained for a Holy People

however, God chose to create numerous animals that are *not fit* for human consumption. *Why?* What is their purpose? One apparent reason is that many unclean animals—such as the vulture and the common catfish—serve as scavengers, cleaning up decaying, disease-causing debris.

But God also knew that He would eventually raise up Israel as His model nation—and *set them apart* from all the world. One of the key ways God would designate Israel as *holy* would be by their strict avoidance of unclean meats. Notice: “I *am* the LORD your God Who has **separated you from the nations**. And you shall [recognize the] **difference between clean animals and unclean**, and between unclean fowls and clean. And you shall not defile your souls by beast, or by fowl, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. And **you shall be holy unto Me**, for I, the LORD, am holy, and have **separated you from the nations**, so that you should be Mine” (Lev. 20:24-26). Likewise, Moses declared: “For you *are* a **holy people** to the LORD your God, and **the LORD has chosen you** to be a specially treasured people to Himself, above all the nations that are on the earth. You shall not eat any abominable thing” (Deut. 14:2-3).

Clean and Unclean Animals During Noah’s Time

We read in Genesis that Noah was to set aside *both* clean and unclean animals so that they might be preserved alive during the Great Flood. “You shall take with you **every clean animal** by sevens, the male and female. And take two of the **animals that are not clean**, the male and female. Also take of the fowls of the air by sevens, the male and the female, to keep *their* kind alive upon the face of all the earth” (Gen. 7:2-3). Notice here that Noah was required to collect *seven* pairs of the clean animals, but only *one* pair of the unclean. Assuming that one pair of the clean animals was, like the pair of unclean animals, to be used for the future procreation of the species, that still left *six extra pairs* of clean animals. Noah used *some* of the clean animals after the Flood as sacrifices to God. But is it not plausible that at least some of the extra clean animals were to be used as *food* for Noah and his family? At any rate, this much is clear: long before the Sinaitic covenant was ratified, the distinction between clean and unclean animals was *well established*. Indeed, the concept of clean and unclean meats predates the Mosaic laws of the Old Testament; thus, it is apparent that the

Chapter One

prohibition against unclean meats was intended to ultimately apply to *all* of humanity.

After the Flood, Noah was instructed to sacrifice *clean* animals before God (Gen. 8:20), further reinforcing this distinction. (It should be noted that Abel, who in Genesis 4:4 offered sacrifices to God from his flock, understood what was acceptable as *clean*.) However, this *ritual* use of clean animals in no way implies that the issue of clean and unclean meats is merely ceremonial. Rather, the distinction between clean and unclean meats was used by God to further delineate the *holy status* of His people. Since God's sacrificial system had profound spiritual implications, only the use of *clean* animals would be acceptable to God.

Since Noah “walked with God” (Gen. 6:9) and was considered “righteous” by God (Gen. 7:1), there is no question that he obeyed *all* of God's revealed laws and precepts—which included instructions concerning clean and unclean meats, the Sabbath, etc. (God had revealed His way of life to the human family from the very beginning. However, with few exceptions humanity chose to disobey and rebel against God, resulting in the Noachian Flood—Genesis 6:5-13.) After the Flood, as Noah and his family were preparing to resettle the earth, God instructed them: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you, even as the green herb I have given you all things” (Gen. 9:3). Was Noah and his family to suddenly begin eating animals that had been previously identified as unclean? To the contrary! God does not negate His own laws—He is not a sovereign “flip flopper.” This passage must be understood in the *context* of what we have already seen concerning Noah. What God meant was that “every moving thing that lives *and that was created for human consumption* shall be food for you.” Looking at the second half of the passage, we know God did not literally give *every* plant as food—such as poisonous mushrooms, etc. Clearly, Genesis 9:3 is based on *previously revealed knowledge* concerning what constituted safe and clean food—plant and animal.

Chapter Two

God's Food Laws— Designed to Protect His People

Based on the principles of the book of Leviticus, God's people are to “distinguish between the holy and unholy, and between the unclean and clean” (Lev. 10:10). Simply put, this means we are to differentiate between what is *set apart* and what is *common*, ordinary—not set apart—and between what has been revealed to be clean and unclean. Indeed, God explicitly declares, “I *am* the LORD your God, and you shall sanctify [set apart] yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I *am* holy” (Lev. 11:44).

But aside from setting God's people apart as holy, the biblical laws of clean and unclean meats are practical matters of health. The fact is, such laws and precepts have been given by God not in order to deny us of any pleasure, but out of loving concern for our wellbeing. Far from being some kind of mysterious ceremonial law, the regulations prohibiting unclean meats were given to *protect* the health of God's people.

In Deuteronomy five, we read: “Oh, that there were such a heart in them [Israel] that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, **so that it might be well with them and with their children forever!**... You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you **so that you may live and that it may be well with you, and you may prolong your days** in the land which you shall possess” (verses 29, 33; also verse 16).

The prophet Jeremiah summarizes the “Old Covenant” between God and Israel: “But this thing I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people; and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you [including the laws concerning the avoidance of unclean meats], **so that it may be well with you**’ ” (Jer. 7:23).

In the New Testament, Jesus taught that it is God's desire for all to enjoy an abundant life (John 10:10). Reflecting this same attitude, John expressed his wish that all of God's people would “prosper and be in health” (III John 2). The apostle Paul warned that a Christian's physical body was a temple of God's spirit—and, therefore, must be well cared for. “Don't you understand that you

Chapter Two

are God's temple, and *that* the Spirit of God is dwelling in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God shall destroy him because the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (I Cor. 3:17). There are many harmful practices that can defile our bodies. Eating unclean meats is one of them.

As His "set apart" nation, God only desired the very best for the children of Israel. Above all, He wanted them to enjoy good health and be free of disease, particularly the diseases common to the nations around them. In fact, in Exodus 15, God promised—based on their unwavering obedience—that he would "put none of these [common] diseases" on the Israelites.

"None of These Diseases"

Having spent hundreds of years as captives of the Egyptians, the children of Israel were familiar with certain diseases common to the land. As God revealed in His instructions to Moses, many of these diseases were *completely avoidable* through the practice of proper hygiene and sanitation (Deut. 23:12-13) and the practice of quarantining those who are ill (Num. 5:2-3). God also gave laws concerning the avoidance of unclean meats that, when followed, would help insure good health (Lev. 11; Deut 14).

As the Israelites were making their way to Sinai, God had not yet clarified the distinction between clean and unclean animals. Yet He warned them: "If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and will do that which is right in His sight, and will give ear to His commandments, and keep all His laws"—*which would include those concerning unclean foods*—"I will put none of these diseases upon you, which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I *am* the LORD Who heals you" (Ex. 15:26). In Deuteronomy, God adds: "You shall be blessed above all people. There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock. And the LORD will take away from you all sickness and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you know, upon you. But He will lay them upon all who hate you" (Deut. 7:14-15). The phrase "which you know" indicates that the Israelites had first-hand experience in suffering from various diseases right along with the Egyptians.

It is important to note that God was not personally "putting diseases" on anyone. Rather, what is really being discussed in these passages is a matter of *cause* and *effect*. If the children of Israel would diligently follow God's loving instructions concerning

God's Food Laws—Designed to Protect His People

good health—which in no small part included the laws of clean and unclean meats—then the result would be freedom from certain diseases.

The fact is, the principles of good health revealed in the Bible are, as health laws, *ahead of their time*. Modern science has taught us that eating animal fat is especially harmful to the human cardiovascular system. Yet God warned the Israelites of this fact millennia ago: “Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘**You shall not eat any fat** of ox, or of sheep, or of goat’ ” (Lev. 7:23). (Note that some passages of Scripture appear to describe fat as a thing to be desired; however, these passages are using “fat” in a *figurative* sense—such as the “fat of the land”—referring to the best and richest parts of the land. Often, an entirely different Hebrew word is used that does not literally mean *fat*, but *rich* or *robust*. In passages dealing with Israel’s sacrificial system, animal fat is always *burned* as God’s portion.)

Thousands of years before modern medicine discovered the need to *quarantine* infectious people when they are ill, God revealed this vital principle: “All the days in which the plague *is* in him he shall be defiled. He is unclean. He shall live alone [in isolation]. His dwelling *shall be outside the camp*” (Lev. 13:46). This particular case deals with *leprosy*, but would apply to any communicable illness. During the 13th and 14th centuries, leprosy in Europe was finally controlled by following this biblical principle. George Rosen writes: “Leadership [in the leprosy epidemic] was [finally] taken by the [Catholic] church, as the physicians had nothing to offer. The church took as its guiding principle the concept of contagion as embodied in the Old Testament.... This idea and its practical consequences are defined with great clarity in the book of Leviticus.... Once the condition of leprosy had been established, the patient was to be segregated and excluded from the community.”¹ In time, this profound concept was “accepted” by the medical establishment, leading to the live-saving practice of *quarantine*.

Mankind has often suffered from devastating diseases—such as cholera, dysentery and typhoid fever—due to the lack of basic hygienic cleanliness. In many cultures it was the general practice to dump human excrement in open places where it would come into contact with drinking water. But thousands of years ago, God instructed His people on how to *avoid diseases* caused by such dangerous practices. “You shall also have a place **outside the camp** where you shall go forth. And you shall have a paddle on your

Chapter Two

weapon. And it shall be, when you sit down outside [to relieve yourself], you shall dig with it, and shall turn back and **cover that which comes from you**” (Deut. 23:12-13).

The theory of the spread of disease by infection would not develop for another 3500 years—but God was way ahead of science. Indeed, the Bible was written to reveal vital information that could not otherwise be easily known. Modern science has had to play “catch up” with God, learning important principles God gave freely to the children of Israel.

Certain diseases and conditions are known today to be caused by the consumption of what Scripture defines as *unclean* meats. Here again, God was well ahead of science. Man is simply unable to easily or reliably determine which animal flesh is safe for human consumption—and which is unsafe. Thus, in His loving concern and desire to protect us, God has revealed this vital knowledge in the Scriptures.

In his article “The Theology of Unclean Food,” Gordon Wenham writes that “unclean animals were recognized by the ancients as a danger to health,” a fact he asserts has been *verified* by “advances in medical knowledge.” Wenham adds, “Moses was hailed as anticipating the findings of modern science.”² As we will see in the next chapter, modern medical science has indeed validated what God has revealed concerning clean and unclean meats.

Clean and Unclean Animal Flesh Defined

Once the children of Israel took possession of the Promised Land, God began codifying numerous laws and statutes through Moses. The laws concerning the eating of clean and unclean meats are found in Leviticus 11 (see Deuteronomy 14 for added details). “And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying, “These *are* the animals which you shall eat among all the animals that are in the earth” ’ ” (Lev. 11:1-2). The remainder of the chapter deals with animals in *four* categories: land animals (mammals), fish and sea creatures, fowl, and that which “creeps” upon the earth (a category including insects, reptiles and rodents). Though many specific animals are mentioned, the chapter does not contain an exhaustive list of what is clean and unclean. *See the “Clean Animals” listing at the end of this chapter.*

Instead, God gives certain criteria designed to designate whether a particular animal is clean or not. For example, *clean* land

God's Food Laws—Designed to Protect His People

animals must 1) have a cloven or split hoof, and 2) chew the cud (Lev. 11:3). *Both are required.* Animals that travel on *paws* (such as cats, dogs, etc.) are unclean (verse 27). A cow obviously has a cloven hoof and chews the cud. A pig, however, while it does have a split hoof, does *not* chew the cud—thus it is unclean (verse 7). Similarly, the unclean camel chews the cud, but does not have a divided hoof (verse 4). A rabbit is unclean because, while it does chew the cud, it does not have cloven hooves, but paws (verse 6). Horses neither chew the cud nor have split hooves, thus are unclean (amazingly, however, people actually eat horse meat!). Concerning these and other unclean land animals, God says: “You shall not eat of their flesh, and you shall not touch their dead body. They *are* unclean to you” (verse 8).

As the Creator of all life, God *deliberately designed this specific criteria*—the split hoof and the chewing of cud—so that we may easily distinguish between clean and unclean animals. Animals that split the hoof *and* chew the cud are “clean”—safe for food. Those that do *not* split the hoof *and* chew the cud are “unclean”—unsafe for food.

In a similar fashion, God defines *clean* fish (and aquatic food in general) as only those having *both* fins and scales (verses 9-10). This eliminates, for example, the highly-popular catfish, which has fins but no scales. Lobster, shellfish, crawfish, oysters, and other assorted crustaceans are all unclean, having neither fins nor scales. On the other hand, bass, perch, salmon, sardine, snapper and tuna are all examples of clean fish, having both fins and scales.

In the fowl category, Leviticus 11 gives a somewhat comprehensive listing of birds that are *not* to be eaten (verses 13-19). The remaining category—that which “creeps” upon the earth—includes reptiles, rodents and almost all insects (all are unclean with the exception of locusts and locust-like insects, which may be eaten).

Moses concludes the chapter, quoting God: “For I *am* the LORD your God, and you shall **sanctify yourselves** [set yourselves apart from all the nations around you], and **you shall be holy**, for I *am* holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves [make yourself unclean] with any kind of creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I *am* the LORD Who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. **You shall therefore be holy**, for I *am* holy. This *is* the law [teaching or instruction concerning] the animals, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that

Chapter Two

creeps on the earth, to **make a difference between the unclean and the clean**, and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten” (verses 44-47).

Animals Designated in Scripture as *Clean*

Mammals that chew the cud and part the hoof:

Antelope
Bison (buffalo)
Caribou
Cattle (beef, veal)
Deer (venison)
Elk
Gazelle
Giraffe
Goat
Hart
Ibex
Moose
Ox
Reindeer
Sheep (lamb, mutton)

Fish with fins and scales:

Anchovy
Barracuda

Bass
Black pomfret (monchong)
Bluefish
Bluegill
Carp
Cod
Crappie
Drum
Flounder
Grouper
Grunt
Haddock
Hake
Halibut
Hardhead
Herring (alewife)
Kingfish
Mackerel (cobia)
Mahimahi (dorado) dolphinfish
(not to be confused with the
mammal dolphin)

God's Food Laws—Designed to Protect His People

Minnow
Mullet
Perch (bream)
Pike (pickerel, jack)
Pollack (pollock, Boston bluefish)
Rockfish
Salmon
Sardine (pilchard)
Shad
Silver hake (whiting)
Smelt (frost fish, ice fish)
Snapper (or ebu, jobfish, lehi, onaga, opakapaka, uku)
Sole
Steelhead
Sucker
Sunfish
Tarpon
Trout (weakfish)
Tuna (ahi, aku, albacore, bonito, tombo)
Turbot (except European turbot)
Whitefish

Birds with clean characteristics:

Chicken
Dove
Duck
Goose
Grouse
Guinea fowl
Partridge
Peafowl
Pheasant
Pigeon
Prairie chicken
Ptarmigan
Quail
Sagehen
Sparrow (and other songbirds)
Swan
Teal
Turkey

Clean Insects

Types of locusts that may include crickets and grasshoppers

Chapter Three

The Dangers of Unclean Meats— A Medical Perspective

Why are some meats considered *unclean* by God? As noted earlier, it is not God’s intention to deny mankind legitimate pleasure and enjoyment from the consumption of foods. Look at the vast array of foods—with an incredible variety of textures and flavors—God has created for us to enjoy. Does it really make sense that God would forbid man to eat pork, catfish, shellfish, rabbit, and numerous other meats for any reason *except* to protect us from damaging or ruining our health?

One of the key purposes of the Bible is to *reveal things to mankind* that we could not otherwise discover on our own. God tells us in Scripture which animals are not good for food because we would simply have no other way of knowing. Trial and error may effectively indicate that a certain food is harmful if there is *immediate* and *consistent* harm following consumption. But the long-term consumption of unclean meats typically results in the slow, chronic degeneration of one’s health—something that cannot be easily traced to a specific cause.

Modern medical science is finally beginning to “catch up” to God as they discover why certain animal meats are less healthy than others. But from their perspective, the picture is far from black and white. For example, people are routinely warned of the dangers of eating pork, yet told that proper cooking is the solution. But why not just stop eating pork altogether?

Pork—A “Homo-Toxin”

Of all the world’s animals, the pig is one of the most unclean—yet it is hailed as the “other white meat.” Pigs are ravenous scavengers and will eat *any* kind of food, including garbage, maggots, rodents, rotting carcasses, excrement—even their own offspring. Farmers often use pigs as virtual “garbage disposals”—which includes things like dead chickens. But even farmers who claim their pigs are fed a grain-only diet cannot stop the animals from eating rodents (carriers of numerous parasites and diseases) and feces.

The Dangers of Unclean Meats—A Medical Perspective

Swine are excellent incubators of toxic parasites and viruses, and often carry a variety of disease-causing organisms while appearing to be healthy. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), numerous viruses and other infectious agents are brought into the United States each year in pigs (mostly from China). Of course, you're probably familiar with H1N1, better known as the "swine flu"—a virus that has made the leap from pig to human.³

In his book *The Genesis Diet*, Dr. Gordon Tessler writes that "the indiscriminate eating patterns of omnivores like pigs make them disease carriers. Pigs are known to carry up to 200 diseases and 18 different parasites and worms, including the deadly [round] worm called *trichinella spiralis*.... Trichinosis [the disease caused by this particular worm] can mimic other diseases such as arthritis, rheumatism, or typhoid fever.... Perhaps many other diseases are misdiagnosed [when] their real cause is ... [the] many parasites found in the flesh of the unclean swine. A person may be committing slow suicide when he or she eats bacon, ham, sausage, or pork chops." Tessler adds that pork "should be considered a homo-toxin (human poison) and the probable cause of many common sicknesses and degenerative diseases."⁴

As a disease, trichinosis was once quite common—and fatal. Once ingested via infected meat, *trichinella spiralis* cysts are dissolved in the stomach, releasing the young worms. The worms then pass into the small intestine where they mature and mate. The female lays eggs that develop into immature worms, which travel extensively through the arteries into muscle tissue where they become encysted.

Both tapeworms (also carried by pigs) and trichinosis can cause a significant inflammatory response in the body, leading to numerous chronic conditions. Often, however, there are no obvious symptoms—or the symptoms resemble those of other illnesses (such as the flu). This has led to the frequent misdiagnosis or non-diagnosis of the disease. The CDC reports that just under three dozen cases of pork related trichinosis occurred from 1997 to 2007.⁵ These are officially diagnosed cases. But because the disease goes easily unrecognized, some believe as many as *one in six* are infected in the United States and Canada!⁶

Research conducted in Bolivia illustrates the point that trichinosis can be *unknowingly prevalent* in a population. The Bolivian government noted that *zero* cases of trichinosis had been reported over a period of several years. Puzzled, they began testing

Chapter Three

pigs, and discovered that at least 25 percent were infected. Subsequently, they tested a cross-section of the general population and discovered widespread infection. The primary symptoms of trichinosis in humans are headaches, muscle aches, fever, and swelling of the extremities. Because these are nonspecific symptoms that do not necessarily indicate any one particular disease, those infected were simply unaware that they were suffering from trichinosis.⁷

This begs the question: how many people unknowingly suffer from pork-derived trichinosis while *assuming* that they are dealing with a common degenerative condition?

Central to the problem is that the CDC declares pork *safe* as long as it is well cooked. But apparently not everyone cooks pork well enough! The fact is, trichinosis is actually *difficult* to kill when cooking. This is why there are so many warnings about eating undercooked pork. The CDC gives this warning on their Web site: “If you eat raw or *undercooked* meats, particularly bear, pork, wild feline (such as a cougar), fox, dog, wolf, horse, seal, or walrus, you are at risk for trichinellosis.”⁸ But God had long ago warned people of this very risk—*don’t defile yourself by eating what is unclean.*

Dr. Rex Russell has studied the dangers of pork for decades. A graduate of Baylor School of Medicine in Houston, Texas, Russell writes: “Many outbreaks of vicious infections have developed in so-called cooked food. If the food is [biblically] unclean, don’t count on cooking it to protect you.... A sobering report from Scotland revealed that food poisoning by toxins, virus or bacteria occurred in spite of thorough inspection at every stage of food preparation, including handling and cooking.”⁹

He continues: “One reason for God’s rule forbidding pork is that the digestive system of a pig is completely different from that of a cow.... Pigs are gluttonous, never knowing when to stop eating. Their stomach acids become diluted because of the volume of food, allowing all kinds of vermin to pass through this [would-be] protective barrier. Parasites, bacteria, viruses, and toxins can pass into the pigs flesh because of overeating. These toxins and infectious agents can be passed on to humans when they eat a pig’s flesh.”¹⁰

Why do pigs carry more disease and toxins than other farm animals? Aside from the dangerous garbage they typically eat, part of the answer has to do with their digestive systems. A pig digests whatever it eats rather quickly, in four hours or less. This fast transit time does not allow for the efficient removal of toxins from the system; the result is that toxins tend to be absorbed and *stored* in fat, muscle

The Dangers of Unclean Meats—A Medical Perspective

tissue, and organs—which are then eaten by people. Another issue is that pigs lack toxin-eliminating sweat glands. Thus, swine are typically toxin-saturated, and cooking does nothing to eliminate toxins.¹¹

By contrast, a cow takes a good 24 hours to digest the grass, hay, or grain it has eaten. This is typical of clean animals that chew the cud. The slow transit time—made possible by their multi-stomach design—allows for *complete digestion* and the efficient *removal* of any present toxins.

Pigs have high *histamine* levels (no doubt as an immune response to their own toxicity), which cause allergic reactions in many people. Their tissues are also particularly rich in sulfur. Too much sulfur is dangerous because it causes a corresponding loss of calcium, potentially leading to osteoporosis (in general, meat-rich diets are linked to bone loss). Moreover, studies have shown that over 50 percent of pigs are contaminated with *salmonella* by the time they reach the processing plant (compare this to only 15 percent of clean animals).¹²

A Mysterious Swine Related Blood Disorder

Aside from the dangers already discussed, the consumption of pork appears to have a mysterious detrimental effect on human blood clotting mechanisms. In her book *Nourishing Traditions*, Sally Fallon writes: “Investigation into the effects of pork consumption on blood chemistry has revealed serious changes [lasting] for several hours after pork is consumed. The pork used [in these tests] was organic and free of trichinosis, so the changes that occurred in the blood were due to some other factor, possibly a protein unique to pork. In the laboratory, pork is one of the best mediums for feeding the growth of cancer cells. The prohibition against pork found in the Bible and the Koran may thus derive from something other than a concern for parasite contamination.”¹³

Fallon cites a study conducted by the Weston Price Foundation on the effects of pork consumption on blood chemistry. The organization’s findings were summarized by Beverly Rubik, Ph.D.—who participated in the study—in the Foundation’s quarterly journal *Wise Traditions in Food, Farming and the Healing Arts*. According to Rubik, the research involved feeding either *marinated* or *non-marinated* cooked pork chops to test subjects, followed by an analysis of their blood chemistry over a period of several hours. Blood can be easily monitored for rapid changes in response to the introduction of substances such as nutrients, drugs, toxins, etc. The blood was

Chapter Three

examined using advanced dark-field microscopes, which give an excellent view of the blood's "biological terrain" including such factors as the stickiness of red blood cells and their tendency to aggregate and clot, as well as the formation of fibrin, the chief clotting protein.

The study demonstrated that the consumption of *non*-marinated pork has a profound effect on human blood chemistry. Rubik writes: "The results show unequivocally that consuming un-marinated cooked pork shows a significant *negative effect* on the blood. Five hours after consumption, subjects showed extremely coagulated blood, with extensive red blood cell (RBC) rouleaux (cells in the formation of stacked coins), RBC aggregates, and the presence of clotting factors, especially fibrin." She adds that "not a single free-floating RBC was observed" in the blood samples.¹⁴

The changes "appeared quite rapidly, in less than ten minutes after blood draw, and did not clear up during an hour of observing the blood under the microscope." Moreover, some of the subjects "felt fatigued after eating the pork chop, which suggests reduced peripheral blood circulation due to RBC stickiness and aggregation. Because the tiniest micro-capillaries are smaller than the diameter of a single blood cell, each cell must pass through singly and deform its shape in order to do so; blood cell aggregates simply cannot pass through [such capillaries]."¹⁵

It is widely accepted that blood clotting disorders are a causative factor in chronic systemic inflammation, which is at the root of chronic disease. Rubik notes that "this condition in the blood, if chronic, is associated with increased risk of chronic degenerative disease, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, autoimmune disorders and others."¹⁶

Apparently, the consumption of *marinated* pork does not produce the same changes in blood clotting as caused by the consumption of *non*-marinated pork. Rubik and her colleagues are at a loss to explain why. She speculates that "pork contains a toxin"—or perhaps, as suggested by Fallon, an unidentified rogue protein—"that heat alone from cooking cannot destroy," but is somehow rendered harmless through the fermentation of marinating.¹⁷

Much of the pork consumed today is *not* marinated. Yet how many people who routinely eat pork are aware of the serious changes taking place in their blood chemistry? Undoubtedly, pork's ability to restrict normal micro-capillary blood flow is a significant factor in today's epidemic of degenerative disease.

Rabbits Eat Their Own Excrement

Rabbit is still consumed in many parts of the world, including the United States. While rabbits do chew the cud, they have paws and not cloven hooves. Thus, they are defined as unclean in Scripture. But even the hare's chewing of cud is suspect, being unlike that of other ruminants. In order for the rabbit to obtain sufficient nutrients from the vegetation it eats, it must *ferment* what it ingests. This requires a fermentation chamber with an alkaline environment. Unlike the cow, the rabbit does not have a *rumen*, or “pre-stomach”—but it does have an unusually large *caecum*. In rabbits, the caecum (basically a pouch where nutrients are absorbed) is located between the intestine and the rectum. According to researchers, the cud the rabbit chews comes from this area and is contaminated with feces. Thus, the rabbit is *coprophagic*—an animal that consumes its own excrement.¹⁸

Consequently, the toxicity levels of rabbits are significantly higher than in other herbivores. Bile salts, fatty acids, gases, and ammonia levels are all at unacceptable levels for human consumption. Many other rodents have similar digestive issues.

Shellfish—Eat at Your Own Risk

As a general rule, *unclean* aquatic creatures are either scavengers or predatory carnivores (such as most sharks). Most clean, edible marine life—those with *both* fins and scales—are found in deep or fast-running waters and primarily consume algae. However, many varieties (such as the common bass) eat smaller fish, frogs, insects, etc.—but clean fish do not eat *dead* matter. They also have an efficient enzymatic system of detoxification.

Most unclean aquatic creatures are bottom feeders—scavengers that scour marine beds for dead, decaying matter. The highly popular catfish—which has fins but no scales—is a bottom-feeding *scavenger*. This feature is precisely what makes unclean marine life *unsafe* to eat.

Several poisoning syndromes are associated with the consumption of *shellfish* (mussels, clams, oysters, and scallops). Four are particularly common: amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP), diarrheal shellfish poisoning (DSP), neurotoxic shellfish poisoning (NSP), and paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP).¹⁹ Human toxicity and mortality sometimes occur after the ingestion of shellfish, but toxicity is also seen in wild animal populations.

Chapter Three

Shellfish are bivalve filter feeders and thus rapidly accumulate toxins produced by microscopic algae such as dinoflagellates, diatoms, and cyanobacteria. The toxicity levels of marine bed algae are often seasonal: when the algae of a given area are in “bloom,” the toxicity is high; shellfish that feed on such algae become highly toxic.²⁰ However, it is important to understand that such toxins are a *normal* byproduct of their existence. In other words, shellfish are *always* toxic, and have the potential to become *dangerously* toxic at any time. Attempting to *predict* the toxicity level of shellfish is highly problematic—a bit like playing Russian roulette!

Paralytic shellfish poisoning is a persistent problem in Alaska and along the West Coast of the United States. Consequently, the State of California once proposed that the following warning label be required on all shellfish packaging: “This food may be dangerous to your health.” The principal toxin responsible for PSP is *saxitoxin*—a deadly neurotoxin estimated to be 1,000 times more toxic than cyanide (there is no antidote for PSP, and all cases require immediate medical attention). According to research by the State of Alaska, “bivalve shellfish feed on a literal smorgasbord of microscopic algae. Bivalves are ideal conveyers of the PSP toxin because they are relatively *indiscriminate filter feeders* and consume massive amounts of algae; [shellfish] are not generally killed by *saxitoxins*, and pass the accumulated *saxitoxins* on to any animal [or human] that eats them.”²¹

It is a common practice to schedule shellfish harvesting around periods of algal bloom. Yet shellfish can store this toxin for several weeks *after* an algal bloom passes; others, such as butter clams, are known to store high levels of such toxins for up to two years. Moreover, toxic algae can form cysts that reside in the sediment during the non-bloom seasons. “These cysts are as toxic as the suspended vegetative form that are present during a toxic bloom. Shellfish, being bottom dwelling filter feeders, can continue to consume cysts during non-bloom periods and accumulate PSP toxin.”²²

In many areas, “off-season occurrences of PSP are most likely caused by [the] retention of toxins from the summer”—long after an episode of algal toxic bloom. Toxic algae are “moved, concentrated, or dispersed by winds, tides, and water currents.” This “patchy distribution” of toxic algae can result in adjacent bays producing shellfish with disparate levels of toxicity—again, making the prediction of risk quite uncertain. For example, in 1993 there

The Dangers of Unclean Meats—A Medical Perspective

were five outbreaks of PSP in the Kodiak area of Alaska, none of which were related to episodes of seasonal algal bloom.²³

The fact is, bottom feeders such as shellfish contain hundreds of times more toxins, heavy metals, and harmful chemicals than fish that feed above the bottom—and just *happen* to have fins and scales. Moreover, the toxins responsible for most shellfish poisonings are water-soluble, heat- and acid-stable, and are thus unaffected by ordinary cooking methods.²⁴

Severe illness from the consumption of raw oysters from the Gulf of Mexico is associated with the bacteria *Vibrio vulnificus*. Septicemia from this bacteria carries a fatality rate of greater than 50 percent. Some 140 cases were reported by the CDC from 1988 through 1995. “*V. vulnificus* is present in up to 50% of oyster beds with the water conditions that prevail in the Gulf of Mexico during warm months.... Cases are most commonly reported during warm-weather months (April-November), and often are associated with eating raw oysters.”²⁵

All aquatic scavengers—shellfish, shrimp, catfish, crabs, lobster, squid—are toxic, and their consumption violates God’s instructions designed to protect human health. Why gamble with your health by eating what God has declared to be *unclean*? Has not God given mankind an abundance of *clean* fish to eat?

Clean and Unclean Birds

As a rule, unclean birds are *predatory*—those that kill and eat other animals—or are scavengers, such as the vulture, that eat carrion. Most of them are listed by name or genus in Leviticus 11 as unclean. Generally, clean birds are herbivores; however, farm birds such as chickens do eat a certain amount of small bugs and worms—and ducks eat small fish. (On most commercial poultry farms today, chickens are fed fishmeal or carcass meal—*processed dead animals*—which raises questions as to their suitability for human consumption.)

While Scripture does not mention clean birds having a “crop,” it does appear that this unique pre-digestion chamber assists in the complete digestion of food and the avoidance of fermentation.

Animals That Eat Animals

God does not reveal in Scripture the precise reasons why the eating of unclean animals is dangerous to our health. Yet we can

Chapter Three

make certain generalizations based on a particularly notable feature of *unclean* animals: they are generally consumers of “secondary” materials—that is, they are animals that eat other animals (or their byproducts). God forbids the consumption of all scavengers and carrion eaters—those that devour other animals. Pigs and vultures scavenge decaying flesh; predatory animals such as wolves and various cats typically prey on the weakest (and often the diseased) of a herd. While unclean marine creatures do eat tremendous amounts of algae, they also scavenge dead, decaying matter—even sewage.

The common denominator seems to be the fact that *unclean* animals habitually eat flesh that would normally sicken or kill humans. By contrast, *clean* animals almost exclusively consume “primary” materials—various forms of plant life. Moreover, clean animals *never* eat dead animals or animal byproducts.

It is apparent that God created numerous unclean animals for the express purpose of *cleaning up* after other animals. Calling them the “sanitation workers of our ecology,” nutritionist David Mainz writes: “Could it be that God, in His wisdom, created certain creatures whose sole purpose is to clean up after the others?”²⁶

Dr. Russell agrees: “Pigs have eaten Philadelphia’s garbage and sewage for more than 100 years, saving the city \$3 million a year in landfill costs. This is a wise use of hogs. They are designed [by God] to clean our environment.” Certain scavenger species of marine life perform a similar function. Catfish, for example, “always show the highest levels of contamination in chemically polluted water. After chemical spills, local fishermen are warned not to eat catfish.” Dr. Russell concludes: “Although swine help clean the earth, and shellfish and catfish are ideally designed to purify the water, we don’t want to eat what they clean up!”²⁷

Chapter Four

Are Biblical Food Laws Relevant for Christians Today?

Contrary to “Christian” myth, Jesus did not come to annul God’s Law, but to *expand* and *magnify* it by emphasizing its original spiritual intent (Matt. 5-6). Early in His ministry, Jesus made the unambiguous proclamation, “Do not [even] think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, **but to fulfill**. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled [brought to pass]” (Matt. 5:17-18). The primary meaning of “fulfill” in verse 17 is to “fill to the full” or to *complete*.

This is not to suggest that the Law was in any way incomplete; but part of Jesus’ ministry was to draw attention to an aspect of the Law that had not been emphasized under the Old Covenant—its all-important *spiritual intent*. In what is generally regarded as a messianic prophecy, the prophet Isaiah foretold that Christ would “*magnify* the Law and make it glorious” (Isa. 42:21). In this key passage, the Hebrew *gadal*—translated as “magnify”—more accurately means to *increase* or *advance* the Law. This is exactly what Jesus did—He increased, advanced or *intensified* the application of the Law by emphasizing its underlying spiritual intent and purpose. The fact is, Christ brought obedience to a new level, making the laws and commandments of God *more binding*.

Jesus went on to say, “Therefore, **whoever shall break [even] one of these least commandments**, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever shall practice and teach *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). Arguably, God’s laws concerning “clean and unclean” meats might be among the “least” of His commandments—yet we are *still* obligated to obey them and teach others to do so as well!

We are not even to *think*—let alone teach—that Jesus came to abolish any part of the Law or the Prophets! Jesus had previously said, “It is written [in the Law], ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but **by every word** that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God’ ” (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3).

Chapter Four

Those who teach contrary to God's clear laws and commandments usually do so because they prefer their own humanly-devised traditions. But note this sober warning concerning just such a mindset: "Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors Me with their lips [they use all the popular Christian-sounding terms and phrases], but their hearts are far away from Me [they do not truly put God first in all things]. But in vain do they worship Me, **teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.**' For leaving the commandment of God, **you hold fast the tradition of men....**" Then He said to them, "Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your *own* tradition.... [Thus, you are guilty of] nullifying the authority of the Word of God by your tradition which you have passed down; and you practice many *traditions* such as this" (Mark 7:6-8, 9, 13).

While Jesus was specifically addressing the blatant hypocrisy of the Pharisees of His day, the principle is fully applicable to Christians today: we must not *pretend* to be followers of Christ, but must truly follow His example in all things—and that means putting God and His ways first, instead of looking to the teachings and traditions of men.

Why do mainstream "Christians" have so much contempt for the laws and commandments of God? The apostle Paul tells us that the "carnal mind *is* enmity against God, [and] is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can it *be*" (Rom. 8:7). As long as we are *thinking carnally*—looking for whatever satisfies the lusts of this life—we will not take God's laws and instructions seriously. Instead, we will look to human reason (and tradition) as our guide: "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.... **There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death**" (Prov. 16:2, 25).

To many, the laws of "clean and unclean" meats may seem like a small thing, perhaps not even a matter of salvation. But consider this: if we are willing to disregard God's food laws—graciously given to safeguard our health—what does that say about our spirit and attitude? Where is our fear of God? Where is our gratitude toward God? *What else* will we compromise on for the sake of "fitting in" or convenience?

Orthodox "Christianity" insists that the Old Testament teachings concerning "clean and unclean" meats are relics of "that Old Covenant"—and are no longer binding on today's liberated

Are Biblical Food Laws Relevant for Christians Today?

“New Covenant” Christian. But is this true? Let us look at the so-called “proof texts” theologians use to teach that the laws of “clean and unclean” meats are null and void.

Did Jesus Declare All Meats as Clean?

It is a widely held *misconception* of modern “Christianity” that Jesus set aside God’s instructions prohibiting unclean meats. An incident recorded in Mark chapter seven is often used as a proof-text for such a view. In this case, Jesus’ disciples were criticized by the Jewish leadership for eating without first *washing their hands*. As we will see, this dispute had nothing to do with clean and unclean meats. Rather, it revolved around Pharisaic traditions of ritual purity, such as ceremonial hand-washing.

“Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes from Jerusalem came together to [Jesus]. And when they saw some of His disciples **eating with defiled hands (that is, unwashed hands)**, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the [pious] Jews, **holding fast to the tradition of the elders**, do not eat unless they [ritually] wash their hands thoroughly. Even *when coming* from the market, they do not eat unless they *first* wash themselves. And there are many other [ritualistic] things that they have received [from their sages] to observe, *such as the* washing of cups and pots and brass utensils and tables. For this reason, the Pharisees and the scribes questioned Him, *saying*, ‘Why don’t Your disciples walk according to the **tradition of the elders**, but [we have observed that they] eat bread with unwashed hands?’ ” (Mark 7:1-5).

Quoting from Isaiah (see above), Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of invalidating the Word of God by their traditions. Drawing a sharp distinction between the Jews’ traditions and the commandments of God, He said: “ ‘For **leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men**, *such as* the washing of pots and cups [and ritual hand-washing]; and you practice many other things like *this*.’ Then He said to them, ‘Full well do **you reject the commandment of God**, so that **you may observe your own tradition**’ ” (verses 8-9).

Notice that Jesus’ primary response was to defend and *fully support* the laws and commandments of God. In no way have God’s laws been abrogated. Having made that point, He went on to deal with the question of eating with “unwashed hands.” Addressing the multitude, He said, “Hear Me, all of you, and understand. There is

Chapter Four

nothing that enters into a man from outside which is able to [spiritually] defile him; but the things that come out from *within* him, those are the things which [spiritually] defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” (verses 14-16).

Obviously, unwashed hands will not particularly defile a person. But Jesus said there was “nothing that enters into a man from outside which is able to defile him.” Does that mean unclean meats were no longer prohibited by God’s Law—that literally *nothing* can defile a person? What did Jesus mean?

It is important to remember that the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 deal with health and cleanliness—not with *spiritual* issues. Eating unclean meats can harm one physically, but they will not defile one spiritually. (However, an insolent attitude toward any of God’s laws can defile one spiritually.) Jesus is referring to one being *spiritually defiled*—not by anything eaten, but by the thoughts and attitudes a person accepts into his or her heart and mind.

Knowing that His disciples did not understand, Jesus said, “Don’t you perceive that anything [food] that enters into a man from outside is not able to [spiritually] defile him? **For it does not enter into his heart**, but into the belly, and *then* passes out into the sewer, purging all food.” Food is simply processed, *purged from the body*. Jesus was talking *spiritually*, making the point that even the dirt on one’s unwashed hands cannot defile the heart or make a person unholy.

The defilement of which Jesus spoke comes from *within*: “That which springs forth **from within a man, that [is what] defiles the man**. For from within, **out of the hearts of men**, go forth evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickednesses, guile, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evils go forth from within, and *these* defile a man” (verses 20-23).

The disputed phrase, “purging all meats” (verse 19, *KJV*), simply means that all foods are ultimately purged from the body. **Clean and unclean meats are nowhere discussed in this passage.** The *New International Version* and a few other “modern” translations spuriously add to verse 19, “In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean’ ” (*NIV*, 1984). **Yet no such phrase exists in the original Greek texts!** This deliberately inserted phrase reflects the anti-law bias common among numerous modern translators.

Suppose Jesus *had* actually meant to abrogate the laws of

Are Biblical Food Laws Relevant for Christians Today?

clean and unclean meats. Such a position would have easily created one of the biggest controversies of His ministry. Imagine how the Pharisees would have reacted if Jesus had even implied that swine's flesh was good for food. But there is not so much as a *hint* in the account that the Jews took Jesus' teachings to be contrary to the Old Testament food laws.

Jesus was simply pointing out that the Pharisees' *ritual washings* were ineffective and unnecessary in preventing spiritual defilement; rather, true spiritual purity is a matter of the heart and mind. Again, this passage does not deal at all with the subject of clean and unclean meats!

Did Paul Teach that All Meat is Good for Food?

There is no question that the apostle Paul believed—and thus taught—“all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). This certainly included God's commands concerning clean and unclean meats. But mainstream Christianity insists that Paul relaxed the biblical injunction against unclean meats. They often cite I Timothy 4:1-5, which is misleading in the *KJV*: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and *commanding to abstain from meats*, which God hath **created to be received** with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. **For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**”

Here, Paul warns Timothy of an apostasy to occur in the end times—which would involve various “doctrines of demons.” One such “doctrine” commands abstinence from certain meats—which Paul counters by *apparently* saying that *all* meat is good for food, that nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving. But is this really what Paul is saying? Is Paul upending centuries of Jewish adherence to Old Testament food laws? Is Paul contradicting his own later claim that he had committed “nothing against the people or the customs of [the] fathers” (Acts 28:17)—which would have included the laws of clean and unclean meats?

Note first that this particular false “doctrine” refers specifically to abstaining from meats that were “created to be received”—that is, *clean* meats created by God to be eaten! God also created animals

Chapter Four

that were never designed to be eaten—thus they are termed *unclean*. But *clean* meats were created to be received as food with thanksgiving. Thus, **this passage is not dealing with clean and unclean meats in general**, but only with *clean* meats—those “created to be received with thanksgiving.”

Next, note that the meat being discussed has been “*sanctified* by the word of God.” Where in the Bible is meat particularly sanctified—*set apart*—for human consumption? Obviously, Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, where God shows exactly which animals are to be avoided and which are to be eaten. Thus, Paul did not say that *every* kind of animal was created by God for food—but that every *clean* animal was created by God for food.

Without question, Paul upheld the laws of clean and unclean meats as a requirement for Christians. He described the animals that Christians are permitted to eat as those which God has “created to be received with thanksgiving.” Paul was actually condemning an *ascetic* doctrine that prohibited even the consumption of *clean* meats.

A correct translation helps resolve the matter:

“Now the Spirit tells *us* explicitly that in *the* latter times some shall apostatize from the faith, *and* shall follow deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons; speaking lies in hypocrisy, their consciences having been cauterized [as if] *with a hot iron*; forbidding to marry; *and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received* with thanksgiving by the faithful, even *by* those who know the truth. For every creature of God *designated for human consumption* is good, and nothing to be refused, *if* it is received with thanksgiving, because it is [already] sanctified [set apart] by the Word of God [in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14] and prayer.” (Please note how *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version* incorporates **inserted words and phrases** in *italic type* in the appropriate places to make the intended meaning clear. All such insertions are based on the contextual meaning of the passage.)

Paul adds that clean meats are also set apart by *prayer*. Indeed, we have Christ’s own example of asking for God’s blessing on our food (Luke 9:16; 24:30; etc.). We also ask God to purify our food from things that have been added without our knowledge. While prayer further sets food apart as approved and blessed by God, it can never make *unclean* meat *clean*.

Are Biblical Food Laws Relevant for Christians Today?

Was Peter Shown that Unclean Meats are Clean?

Many assume that the apostle Peter's vision in Acts 10 represents a *reversal* of God's laws prohibiting unclean meats. However, nowhere in the passage is it ever suggested that God had "cleansed" unclean meats. Rather, this idea is "read into" the text by those with a predisposition against God's laws. When the passage is read properly, it becomes obvious that Peter's vision in no way authorized a change in the laws of clean and unclean meats. As we will see, Peter's vision had nothing to do with clean and unclean meats, but dealt with the issue of Gentiles being brought into the Church as "clean."

While staying in Joppa, Peter went up on the housetop about noon to pray. In a vision from God, he saw heaven open and what appeared to be a great sheet descending toward him full of unclean wild beasts, creeping things, and unclean birds. A voice came to Peter, saying "Rise, Peter, kill and eat" (verse 13).

Peter did not automatically assume that it was suddenly permissible to eat unclean meats. He *knew* that Christians were to continue living according to God's laws. His response shows that he obviously did not consider the laws concerning clean and unclean foods to be obsolete: "In no way, Lord," he replied, "for I have never eaten anything *that is* common or unclean." The voice from heaven added, "What God has cleansed, you are not to call common" (verses 14-15).

The sheet of unclean animals went up and down *three* times. Again, Peter never indicated that he believed it was now acceptable to eat unclean meat. Finally, he awoke, wondering what the vision actually meant. But without question, he knew what the vision did *not* mean—that it in no way reflected a change in the laws concerning unclean foods.

In time, Peter was led by God to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter understood that he was to preach the gospel to Cornelius and to his household—and that they would be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. Peter began to grasp the fact that God was opening the door of salvation to Gentiles. Suddenly, the meaning of the vision became clear. Talking to Cornelius, Peter said, "You know that it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to associate with or come near to anyone of another race. **But God has shown me** [in the earlier vision] **that no man should be called common or unclean**" (verse 28).

Based on a perversion of God's laws regarding what is clean and unclean, *Jewish tradition* forbade *Pharisaic* Jews to have a close

Chapter Four

association with Gentiles. Jews considered Gentiles to be unclean, unsuitable for physical contact. Peter was quite familiar with these Pharisaic traditions.

God was showing Peter and the Church that Gentiles were being offered salvation—that they could become *spiritually* circumcised. Thus, **the subject matter of Acts 10 has nothing to do with clean and unclean meats.** God simply used the vision of unclean animals to emphasize a point to Peter—that when God has *spiritually* cleansed a Gentile, he is not to be deemed common or unclean.

Ultimately, Peter understood that “God is not a respecter of persons, **but in every nation the one [Jew or Gentile] who fears Him and works righteousness is acceptable to Him**” (verses 34-35).

Does Romans 14 Abrogate the Laws of Clean and Unclean Meats?

Romans 14 is a classic example of poor translation and even poorer exegesis on the part of modern scholars and churchgoers. To assume that Paul is in this discourse proclaiming the abrogation of various laws and commandments of God is to treat the text unfairly. Such a position also fails to take into consideration the plain statements made by the apostle as to his faithfulness to the Old Testament: “But I confess to you that according to the way which they call heresy, so I serve the God of my fathers, believing [and thus teaching] **all things that are written in the Law and the Prophets**” (Acts 24:14; see also Acts 28:17; etc.).

In the Protestant view, Romans 14 pronounces the annulment of the seventh-day Sabbath (verses 5-6) and the laws of clean and unclean meats (verses 2, 14, 17). To the contrary, the validity of God’s laws are not the issue in Romans 14; rather, the entire chapter revolves around the Christ-like attitude of showing love to fellow brethren by *not offending them* in areas where they might be “weak in the faith” (verse 1). As is sometimes the case, the newly converted may lack the confidence to take up certain *lawful* practices that are commonplace for more mature Christians.

In the case of Romans 14, verses 2-3 teach that those who enjoy eating *clean* meat are not to be critical of those who prefer to be vegetarians. If one’s conviction is to avoid meat altogether, then so be it; there is no sin in being a vegetarian or a meat-eater—God accepts them both (verse 3). There is not even a *hint* in this passage that Paul

Are Biblical Food Laws Relevant for Christians Today?

has somehow reversed his standing on clean and unclean meats.

It is also possible that Paul was dealing here with the issue of eating *clean* meat that had been previously sacrificed to idols. Paul had previously addressed this problem in the church at Corinth. In I Corinthians 10, Paul shows that eating *clean* meat sacrificed to an idol is harmless: “Every *lawful* [clean] thing that is sold in *the* market you *may* eat, without asking questions for the sake of conscience” (verse 25). Mature Christians knew that the gods to which such meats were sacrificed were no gods at all, and that such meat—as long as it was not unclean—was still good to be eaten. In eating and drinking—in fact, *in all things*—we must bring glory to God and be careful to avoid offending anyone (verses 31-32). Those in Romans 14 who were declining to eat meat may have done so because they were uncomfortable with the idea of eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul was admonishing mature Christians to be patient and nonjudgmental with those lacking in faith. Again, there is nothing in either of these passages that actually deals with clean and unclean meats.

Romans 14:5-6 is misconstrued by many to suggest that Christians are free to choose any day of the week to keep holy. Looking at the context, however, the subject is still *avoiding offence* in one’s personal, *lawful* preferences. The passage indicates that some were showing a personal preference for a particular day of the week on which to *eat* or *not eat* meat (or perhaps a particular day on which to *fast* or *not fast*). Paul sums up the godly approach in verse 13: “Therefore, we should no longer judge one another, but judge this instead: Do not put an occasion of stumbling or a cause of offense before your brother.” This passage has nothing to do with clean and unclean meats, nor does it in any way challenge the seventh-day Sabbath.

In the *KJV*, a poorly translated verse 14—“there is nothing unclean of itself”—has become a focal point for those wishing to believe God’s food laws have been overturned. The word *unclean* ties in naturally with the earlier references to *meat*, leading to the assumption that the subject really is clean and unclean meats. But is Paul—who taught the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27)—really saying that *nothing* is unclean?

The Greek word translated “unclean” is *koinos*, meaning “common.” But to a Jew the word also carried the meaning of *ceremonially defiled*. The Greek word for unclean (in reference to meats) is *akathartos*. Recall Peter’s vision in Acts 10, where he

Chapter Four

answered God in verse 14: “In no way, Lord, for I have never eaten anything *that is* common [*koinos*, ritually defiled] or unclean [*akathartos*].”

With this understanding of *koinos*—and having previously looked at the practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols—we can understand Romans 14:14—“I understand and am persuaded by *the* Lord Jesus that nothing *is* common [ritually defiled] of itself, except to the one who regards anything to be common [defiled]—to that one *it is* common [defiled].” Essentially, Paul was saying that no *biblically clean* meat was, of and by itself, defiled just because it was sacrificed to a false god. However, for those who were “weak in the faith”—who lacked the confidence of a mature Christian—if they *believed* meat sacrificed to idols *was truly defiled* and should not be eaten, to them it *was defiled* and should not be eaten.

Why? Paul gives the answer in verse 23: “But the one who doubts is condemned if he eats because *his eating is* not of faith; for everything that *is* not of faith is sin.” This statement reflects a profound Christian principle dealing with one’s conscience. Simply put, if one suspects that a particular behavior might be contrary to God’s way of life, he or she must avoid that behavior. If you have doubts about a certain action *and do it anyway*, you have defiled your conscience. So if one is convinced that it is wrong to eat meat defiled through pagan practices, he or she *must not eat* of such meat. The sin lies in the fact that you have compromised your conscience—the very opposite of building righteous character.

Again, Romans 14 has *nothing* to do with clean and unclean meats, but wonderfully expands on the “second greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:39)—exercising *love* for your brother. We must not offend one another by being judgmental or critical of another’s lack of faith; moreover, we must not offend one another even by our personal *lawful* preferences. Paul writes: “So then, we should pursue the things of peace and the things that edify one another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of meat. All things *that are lawful are* indeed pure; but *it is* an evil thing for someone to cause an occasion of stumbling through his eating. *It is* better not to eat meat, or drink wine, or *anything else* by which your brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have *it* to yourself [privately] before God. Blessed *is* the one who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But the one who doubts is condemned if he eats because *his eating is* not of faith; for everything that *is* not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:19-23).

Conclusion

As followers of Christ, it is God's desire for us to be holy—*set apart* from the evil society around us (John 15:19; 17:14, 16). Such holiness is reflected in our thoughts and attitudes, our actions and conduct, and in our willingness to obey God in all things. As the collective “temple of God” (I Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20), we are to be clean and unpolluted. Thus, God commands that we eat *only* that which builds us up, supports our health, and promotes healing. In His mercy, He has given us clear directives as to what animal flesh is beneficial as food—and what must be avoided as harmful.

How will we respond?

Certainly, the issue of clean and unclean meats is *of itself* not a matter of salvation—not a “weightier matter” of the Law (Matt. 23:23; *KJV*). But our willingness—or lack of willingness—to yield ourselves in obedience to God is telling. Do we really follow Christ in *all* things—or are we Christians “in name only”? Do we put our lusts, desires, and appetites first, or do we put God's perfect way of life first?

Will we, like Israel, be rebellious and provoke God to anger?

The prophet Isaiah notes that Israel was a particularly “rebellious people”—walking “in the way that is not good, *even* after their own thoughts [what *seemed right* to them]” (Isa. 65:2). They continually provoked God with their sins, which included eating “swine's flesh” and the “broth of vile things” (verse 4). Contextually, Isaiah 65 and 66 deal with Israel and Judah in the *end time*—and on into the age to come. Thus, God's laws of clean and unclean meats are binding even on the modern-day descendants of Israel.

In fact, at the time of Jesus' return there will be those who will *bring judgment upon themselves* for their persistent violation of God's laws—including those concerning clean and unclean meats. “For behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with His chariots like a tempest, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the LORD will execute judgment with all flesh; and the slain of the LORD will be many. ‘Those who sanctify themselves [through their own ways and traditions], and purify themselves *to go* into the gardens, after the [idolatrous] rites of Achad, **eating swine's flesh, and [that which is an] abomination, and the mouse, will be cut off together,**’ says the LORD” (Isa. 66:15-17).

While these passages deal with vile aspects of pagan forms of worship, they clearly bring God's laws of clean and unclean meats into the *present* and *future*. Where does this leave today's Christian? Again, are we going to *follow God's way*—or not? In God's eyes, refraining from the consumption of unclean foods is one of the key identifying signs of those who truly *belong to Christ*—those who are willing to be holy, set apart for eternal service in His kingdom.

Remember Moses' admonition to the children of Israel: "Be careful to observe and obey all these words which I command you, **so that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever** when you do *that which is* good and right in the sight of the LORD your God" (Deut. 12:28). May God help you to learn to "distinguish between the holy and unholy, and between the unclean and clean" (Lev. 10:10).

Notes

¹Rosen, *History of Public Health*, 1993, p. 62

²Wenham's article was published in the *Evangelical Quarterly*, January 1981

³www.draxe.com/why-you-should-avoid-pork

⁴Tessler, *The Genesis Diet*, 1996

⁵www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5206a1.htm

⁶[www.onlinetruth.org/articlesfolder/
eating_pork_can_be_hazardous_to_your_health](http://www.onlinetruth.org/articlesfolder/eating_pork_can_be_hazardous_to_your_health)

⁷Ibid.

⁸www.cdc.gov/parasites/trichinellosis/gen_info/faqs.html

⁹Russell, *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living*, 1999, p. 80

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹www.draxe.com/why-you-should-avoid-pork

¹²[www.amazingdiscoveries.org/C-deception-
unclean_animals_pig_fish_mammals](http://www.amazingdiscoveries.org/C-deception-unclean_animals_pig_fish_mammals)

¹³Fallon, *Nourishing Traditions*, 2010, p. 32

¹⁴Rubik, "How Does Pork Prepared in Various Ways Affect the Blood—An Investigation via Live Blood Analysis." *Wise Traditions in Food, Farming and the Healing Arts*, Fall 2011. Found at www.westonaprice.org/food-features/how-does-pork-prepared-in-various-ways-affect-the-blood.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸[www.amazingdiscoveries.org/C-deception-
unclean_animals_pig_fish_mammals](http://www.amazingdiscoveries.org/C-deception-unclean_animals_pig_fish_mammals)

¹⁹www.emedicine.medscape.com/article/818505-overview

²⁰www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paralytic_shellfish_poisoning

²¹*Alaska's Marine Resources*, University of Alaska, October 1996

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴www.emedicine.medscape.com/article/818505-overview

²⁵www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00043142.htm

²⁶Meinz, *Eating by the Book*, 1999, p. 225

²⁷Russell, p. 81

Christian Biblical Church of God Offices:

United States

Post Office Box 1442
Hollister, California 95024-1442

Canada

Post Office Box 125
Brockville, Ontario
K6V 5V2 Canada

Australia

GPO 1574
Sydney 2001
Australia

United Kingdom

Post Office Box 8224
Witham CM8 1WZ
United Kingdom

New Zealand

Post Office Box 73
Pokeno 2473
New Zealand

Republic of South Africa

Post Office Box 494
Frankfort 9830
Rep. of South Africa

Iglesia de Dios Cristiana y Bíblica

www.iglesiadedioscristianaybiblica.org
PO Box 831241
San Antonio, TX 78283

www.cbcbg.org
www.churchathome.org
www.theoriginalbiblestore.org
www.afaithfulversion.org