

commandments of God by declaring "all foods," including meats God had forbidden, "clean"? If so, this would make Jesus either a hypocrite, or stupid, or both. These are charges I would certainly not want to make against Him! Yet this is exactly what the standard Christian position makes Him out to be.

The real meaning of Yeshua's words can be clarified by looking at the context. The controversy in this chapter was not over whether or not pork is kosher. The controversy was initiated when the scribes and Pharisees criticized Yeshua's disciples for eating with unwashed hands. The Pharisees believed that *Shibta*, an evil spirit, sat upon the hands at night, and this spirit had to be washed off before eating. (Dake Reference Bible, 42, fn.r) Jewish beliefs about hand washing are stated in the Talmud:

- "A person who despises the washing of the hands before a meal is to be excommunicated" (Ber. 47b).
- "Whoever eats bread without first washing his hands is as though he had sinned with a harlot" (Sot. 4b).
- "Whoever makes light of the washing of his hands will be uprooted from the world" (Sot. 4b).
- "Whoever eats bread without scouring his hands is as though he eats unclean bread" (Sot. 4b).

These beliefs are rooted in the traditions of men, not in the commandments of God. When Yeshua made His statements that seem to be "declaring all foods clean," He was simply saying that kosher food does not become unkosher if it is eaten with unwashed hands. He was simply disagreeing with the belief that "whoever eats bread without scouring his hands is as though he eats unclean bread." His final statement makes it clear that this was the point He was making: "...but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man" (Mt. 15:20).

The issue was not over whether or not pork and shellfish are kosher. God had already made that clear in the Torah. The issue was over whether or not unwashed hands caused kosher food to become unkosher. The only way we can say He "declared all foods clean" is to say that He "declared all kosher foods clean," even if eaten with unwashed hands. Yeshua, a Torah-

observant Jew, would not have considered pork or shell fish to be "food."

ACTS 10

Acts 10 tells about Peter's vision of a great sheet descending from heaven. The sheet is filled with unclean animals, and a voice says, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." Peter says, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."

This was many years after the Crucifixion and Resurrection. If Yeshua had "declared all foods clean" several years earlier, Peter certainly didn't know anything about it! Yet many Christians believe that God sent this vision to tell Peter that He had "changed His mind" about the dietary laws, and abolished them. However, the context shows that the vision had nothing at all to do with a change in God's dietary laws.

The message of the vision was that God was cleansing the Gentiles through their faith in the Messiah, and God wanted these Gentiles to be part of the Body of Messiah, a body which at this time consisted of only native-born Jews and of proselytes who had undergone a full, formal conversion to Judaism. The unclean animals in the sheet were symbolic of the Gentile nations. This kind of symbolism would not have seemed unusual to Peter, a Jew who was familiar with the Scriptures. In the writings of the Prophets, the Gentile nations are symbolized by unclean animals such as the eagle, the lion, the bear, and the leopard. (See Ezk. 17 & Dan. 7).

To properly understand Peter's vision, we must put ourselves in Peter's shoes. Like the Messiah he followed, Peter was a Torah-observant man. He knew God had clearly commanded His people to not eat certain animals. This is why he said, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

To put yourself in Peter's shoes, imagine that you, as a born-again Christian man, go into a trance and see a great sheet let down from heaven. The sheet is filled with naked women. You hear a voice address you by name and say, "Arise, take and commit adultery!"

Like Peter, you would be taken aback by such a vision, because you know that the Scriptures clearly forbid

such an act. The only conclusion you could draw from such a vision would be: a) it is of the devil; or b) it is of the Lord, but certainly not meant to be taken in a literal sense.

When the messengers of Cornelius arrived, Peter understood that the vision was indeed from the Lord. The fact that these men were Gentiles led Peter to understand the true meaning of the vision: "God hath shown me that I should call no MAN common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Peter's explanation makes it clear that the vision was meant to be understood in a figurative sense.

Peter had the brains to know that God would not command him to do something that the Scriptures clearly forbid. Peter understood that the vision had nothing at all to do with a change in the dietary laws; it was God's way of showing Peter His intention to graft the Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel through their faith in Israel's Messiah. And those grafted into Israel should obey the commandments which God gave to Israel.

COL. 2:16

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink," Paul wrote. Does this mean that Christians are absolutely free from any dietary restrictions? If that is the case, then I can be a glutton and a drunkard. "But gluttony and drunkenness are condemned in other Bible passages!" you object. True. And eating meat from unclean animals is condemned in other Bible passages, too.

As with other New Testament passages, we just need to look at the context of this statement to understand its intended meaning. Verses 13 & 14 tell us we have been forgiven because the "certificate of debt" has been "taken out of the way." This "certificate of debt" is not God's Torah. This is the *χειρογραφον* (*cheirographon*). This word is used only one time in the New Testament. It is a legal term used in extra-Biblical Greek writings, and it means "certificate of indebtedness" (Gingrich Lexicon). In this context, it means that the *record of our sins* has been thrown out of God's Court.

Because the Messiah died for our sins, this record of our transgressions is inadmissible evidence in the Courtroom of Heaven. Because of the work of our

Advocate, Yeshua, we have triumphed over our accuser (verse 15). It is for *this reason* that we are to let no man judge us: "Let no man *therefore* judge you..." The word "therefore" points us back to the previous verses which I have just discussed. One way we could paraphrase the passage is this:

- You have been forgiven. (v. 13)
- The record of your sins has been removed from God's Courtroom through the work of your Advocate, Yeshua. (v. 14)

● He triumphed over your accuser, the devil, so you can be victorious over sin. (v. 15)

● For that reason ["therefore"], don't give anyone the opportunity to condemn you ["let no man judge you"] in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or the new moon, or the sabbath days. In other words, through the Messiah you have the power to obey the commandments of God which regulate these things. Therefore walk in obedience so that no man can condemn you for not obeying God's commandments regarding food, drink, holy days, new moon, and sabbaths.

● These things are important because they are shadows [not "were" shadows] of things yet to come [not "of things that have already come"]. (v. 17)

The above paraphrase affirms God's dietary laws rather than abolishing them. Even if someone wants to interpret Col. 2:16 to mean "don't worry about dietary laws," the context forces us to understand this to mean "don't worry about man-made regulations concerning food and drink." The entire passage is dealing with man-made regulations of human origin:

- "...lest any MAN should beguile you" (2:4)
- "Beware lest any MAN spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of MEN..." (2:8)
- "Let no MAN therefore judge you..." (2:16)
- "Let no MAN beguile you..." (2:18)
- "...why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances ... after the commandments and doctrines of MEN?" (2:20-22)

Six times the word *man/men* is mentioned in Col. 2. Even the NIV acknowledges that these verses are talking not about God's commandments, but about man-made regulations: The

NIV titles this section "Freedom From Human Regulations Through Life With Christ." Paul was dealing with teachers who were imposing *man-made* regulations as a means to attaining spirituality. Paul was not saying that the laws of God's Torah are not important. Indeed, the word *law* does not appear even one time in the entire Book of Colossians.

1 TIM. 4:1-5

Paul tells Timothy that "in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." One mark of these deluded apostates is "commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by those who know the truth." Paul continues: "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."

Is this passage telling us that we can disregard God's commandments that forbid the eating of unclean animals? We might come to this conclusion if we ignore two phrases which qualify and limit the meaning of "every creature." The first qualifying phrase is "which God hath created to be received [i.e., received as food; created to be eaten]." Which creatures did God create to be received as food? Did God create swine, shellfish, rats, maggots, lizards, bats and moles to be received as food? Obviously the phrase "every creature" means "every creature which God created to be received as food."

How do we know which creatures God created to be received as food? The answer to that question is in the second qualifying phrase, "sanctified by the word of God." Where does the Word of God tell us which animals are sanctified and set apart to be received as food? In Leviticus 11 & Deuteronomy 14, the chapters that give the dietary laws.

If we say that "every creature" is not limited and qualified by the phrases "which God hath created to be received" and "sanctified by the word of God," then we have a problem, because the meat of some animals is poisonous and will kill a person. These creatures are obviously not intended to be received as food.

Words such as *all* and *every* are

often limited in their meaning. In this same epistle Paul tells Timothy that God "richly gives us all things to enjoy" (6:17). Does "all" in this verse mean "all" in an unlimited sense? Does God give us *Playboy* magazine and other pornography to enjoy? Does He give us our neighbor's wife to enjoy? Does He give us heroin, cocaine, and marijuana to enjoy? Obviously "all things" does not include those things which God has forbidden, nor those things which are deadly. In the same way, "every creature" does not include those animals which God has forbidden.

We see a similar use of "every" in Gen. 1:29, where God says to Adam, "Behold, I have given you EVERY herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth ... to you it shall be for food." Does this mean that all herbs are suitable to eat? How about hemlock, poison ivy, and marijuana? In the 1960s I saw a hippie poster with this Bible verse from Genesis in bold letters superimposed over a large marijuana leaf. Under the Bible verse in smaller letters it read, "This has been overruled by a 'higher authority.'"

The standard Christian position declares that there are no restrictions on what we eat. But Christians do not think through to the logical implications of this theological position. If there are no restrictions, then we cannot criticize people who eat marijuana brownies. We cannot criticize gluttons and drunkards. We cannot even criticize cannibals, for man is also one of God's creatures!

LUKE 10:8 & 1 COR. 10:27

"...eat such things as are set before you" (Luke 10:8).

"...Whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (1 Cor. 10:27).

Did Yeshua mean that when we are a guest we should eat anything a host offers us, even if it is meat which God has forbidden in the Torah? Did Paul mean that we should not even ask whether or not the meat is from an unclean animal?

There are a few things we need to consider. Let's look at Luke 10:8 first. Yeshua spoke these words when He sent out the seventy. These were seventy Torah-observant Jews who followed a Torah-observant Rabbi.

Rabbi Yeshua had told His disciples, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6).

It is obvious from this statement that the disciples would be lodging in Torah-observant Jewish homes, where the kosher laws were followed. It is ridiculous to suppose that the disciples might have been offered a pork chop in one of these Jewish homes. Even if this very unlikely possibility had occurred, the disciples would have had enough sense to know that this is not what their Master meant when He said to "eat such things as are set before you." He simply meant to be content with the food which your host provided.

Paul's statement in 1 Cor. is very similar to Yeshua's statement, but the context is quite different. Paul is dealing with the question of eating food which has been offered to idols. The New Testament clearly teaches that it is wrong for Christians to eat food offered to idols. Four times this is written, in Acts 15:20 & 21:25 and in Rev. 2:14 & 2:20. On the surface, Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 8 seems to contradict these verses in Acts and Revelation. But Paul clarifies the issue in 1 Cor. 10, when he writes that "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice [to idols], they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils" (v. 20f).

The problem the Corinthians were facing was this: They did not want to eat meat which had been offered to idols. Sometimes meat sold in the public markets came from animals which had been sacrificed to idols. It might be difficult or impossible to find out whether or not a specific cut of beef came from a cow which had been offered to an idol. Should the Corinthian Christians continue to buy meat at the public market, not knowing whether or not the animal had been offered to an idol?

Paul answered this question: "Whatsoever is sold in the market, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (1 Cor. 10:25). Apparently Paul was telling the Corinthians that a person was guilty of eating meat offered to idols

only if he knew that the meat had been offered to an idol. If a host offering you meat happened to say, "This was offered in sacrifice to idols," Paul said that a Christian should "eat not" (10:28). But if the host said nothing, then the Christian was free to eat the meat. It is in this context that Paul writes "whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake" (10:27). In other words, do not ask whether or not the meat has been offered to idols. However, this does not mean that we cannot ask what kind of animal the meat came from.

Here is a real-life illustration. In 1989 I was standing with some friends near a Hindu temple in India. A Hindu man took some dried fruit from a plate sitting at the foot of one of the idols outside the temple. He came over and offered us some. Because I knew it was food which had been offered to an idol, I politely refused it. Yet I felt free to eat in Indian restaurants, because I had no way of knowing whether or not the food being served to me had previously been offered to idols.

Many well-meaning Christians believe that Jesus' and Paul's instructions to "eat what is set before you" means that a missionary should not refuse food that a host offers, even if it is meat from an unclean animal. Refusing the food might insult the host and hinder him from accepting the gospel. Again, Christians do not think through to the logical implications and conclusion of this position. If it is permissible (and actually preferable) to knowingly disobey God's dietary laws to avoid offending one's host, then why would it not be permissible (or preferable) to disobey other Divine laws to avoid offending one's host? In some cultures a man shows hospitality to a guest by letting the guest sleep with his (the host's) wife. If the guest refuses this offer, it is a great insult to the host and the host's wife. In other cultures it is an insult if a guest refuses to get drunk with the host. In the drug culture it is an insult to refuse to get high with the host. Our quiet, humble obedience to God's commandments will sometimes offend people who are ignorant of God's commandments. Offending some people is one of the unpleasant side-effects of obedience.

ISAIAH 65 & 66

In Isaiah God speaks about "a rebellious people which walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts; a people that provoke Me to anger continually to My face" (65:2f). One of the reasons these people provoke the Lord is because they "eat swine's flesh, and the broth of unclean meat is in their pots" (65:4).

"But that's not talking about Gentiles!" someone objects. "That verse is talking about Israel! Paul says so in Romans 10!" True. And in Romans 11, the very next chapter, Paul says that Gentiles who believe in the Messiah are grafted into Israel. Paul also says that believing Gentiles are made a part of "the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12). The context of Isaiah's prophecy is after the Gentiles have been grafted in and made a part of Israel. Therefore these words are not addressed only to Jews. They are also addressed to non-Jewish Christians living under the New Covenant, because these Christians are grafted into Israel.

Before the new heavens and new earth are established, Yahweh declares that He will consume those people "who eat swine's flesh, detestable things, and mice" (Isa. 66:17). The context of this prophecy is the end times, right before the new heaven and new earth are established. This tells us that at this time of history, the Lord still expects His people to obey His dietary laws.

I will not presume to speculate on the standing or the fate of Christians who knowingly disregard God's commandments concerning meat from unclean animals. God is merciful, and I believe He forgives His people when they err in ignorance, when they honestly do not know any better. Of course there is a difference between willful ignorance and innocent ignorance.

I believe that before the Lord destroys those who "eat swine's flesh, detestable things, and mice," that He will make it clear to those who truly love Him that the dietary laws are still valid and for our own good. It is my prayer that this article will be instrumental in helping to open the eyes of those who truly love Him. □



GOD'S DIETARY LAWS: ABOLISHED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

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READERS: The purpose of this article is not to condemn or insult those who hold to the standard Christian teaching that God's dietary laws are abolished under the New Covenant. The purpose of the article is to examine the New Testament passages which are commonly quoted in support of this teaching, and to show that these passages do not really teach what most Christians think they teach. -DB

The Bible tells us that there was a distinction between clean and unclean animals for at least a thousand years before the Torah was given to Moses. This distinction between clean and unclean animals is mentioned in Gen. 7:2 and 8:20, in the account of Noah's Flood. Genesis does not tell us which animals were clean and which were unclean, but it is obvious that Noah knew the difference.

About a thousand years later, when the Torah was given to Moses, God went into great detail and listed which animals were clean (kosher; fit for human consumption) and which were unclean (non-kosher; not fit for human consumption). The entire 11th chapter of Leviticus is devoted to this subject. A shorter version of the list is repeated in Deuteronomy 14.

Orthodox Jews take these commandments literally, and do not eat pork, shellfish, or any of the other forbidden meats. Christians, on the other hand, feel that there is nothing wrong with eating these things. Many Christians (and doctors and nutritionists, too) will admit that people would be a lot healthier if they followed God's dietary laws, and a small number of Christians actually do make an effort to avoid meat from unclean animals. But the great majority of Christians do not view the dietary laws as Divine commandments which ought to be obeyed.

A number of arguments have been put forth to support the standard Christian position. Probably the oldest argument is drawn from the Second Century *Epistle of Barnabas*. The writer spiritualizes the dietary laws, and says that the various unclean animals

represent different types of behavior which a Christian should not engage in. While there may be a legitimate analogy here (Christians shouldn't behave like pigs, etc.), the analogy does not prove that God does not want His people to take the commandments literally and abstain from these meats.

Of course the most common argument against the validity of the dietary laws is the claim that God abolished them in the New Testament. This claim is often coupled with the idea that God originally gave the dietary laws because people didn't have refrigeration in Old Testament times. I've got news for you. People didn't have refrigeration in New Testament times, either. If God's dietary commandments had anything at all to do with the absence of refrigeration, He wouldn't have "abolished" them until about a hundred years ago, when refrigeration was invented.

There are six New Testament passages which can give the impression that God did, indeed, abolish the dietary commandments which He established in the Old Testament. However, a close look at these passages reveals that they really prove no such thing. The only way a person can use any of these passages to "prove" the nullifying of the dietary laws is to 1) ignore the context of the passage; 2) ignore the historical background of the passage; 3) ignore what the rest of the Bible says about the subject; 4) ignore the implications and logical conclusions of this theological position.

Before we look at the six New Testament passages, let us consider two important questions: 1) Were the dietary laws, as written in the Bible, man-made traditions, or were they commandments of God? Bible-believers must admit that these were, indeed, commandments which God expected His people to obey. 2) Did the Son of God teach His disciples to disobey the commandments of God? Some might think this is a ridiculous question, yet this is exactly what some Christians actually believe Jesus did in Matt. 15, the first passage we will look at.

MATT. 15:11, 17f

"Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man ... Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man."

Many sincere Christians believe that Jesus abolished the Old Testament dietary laws when He made these statements. This idea is given further support in modern translations of the parallel passage in Mark 7:19, where the NASB adds "(Thus He declared all foods clean)" and the NIV says "(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods 'clean.')

What most Christians do not know is that this parenthetical interpretation of Jesus' words does not exist in the *Textus Receptus*, the "Received Text" that was accepted by the Church as the only authoritative Greek New Testament text until about a hundred years ago. This parenthetical interpretation of Jesus' words was obviously a comment that some scribe wrote in the margin of the text. Later scribes accidentally or deliberately incorporated the marginal comment into the text itself, so the statement appears only in corrupted texts. But the statement does not appear in the *Textus Receptus*, which is why the KJV says nothing about Jesus "declaring all foods clean."

Let us examine this passage, though, and see if Yeshua really was declaring all foods clean. If we back up a few verses, we see Yeshua rebuking the scribes and Pharisees for disobeying the commandments of God: "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God?" He asks them. "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men. You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! You invalidate the word of God by your tradition." After making statements like these, are we to suppose that Jesus would then set aside and invalidate one of the com-