

Dietary Laws (Clean & Unclean)

Perhaps the most significant distinction between the Old and New Testament is the Law's ruling on matters of "clean and unclean". Many prohibitions exist in the book of Leviticus describing various health conditions, practices, and foods that were deemed "unclean". While few Christians still consider them valid or applicable, a growing number still do, especially in areas of diet, such as kosher meats, etc. Among them are the Seventh Day Adventists and the Hebraic Roots proponents.

So let's examine the Word to see what the New Testament teaches in regards to this subject. Notice the following Scriptures:

Whatsoever is sold in the marketplace, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. (1 Cor 10:25-27).

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 (1Ti 4:3-4).

For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. ...I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that **there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean** (Rom 14:2; 14).

As concerning therefore **the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.** Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour **eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.** **But meat commendeth us not to God:** for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But **take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.** For if any man **see thee** which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is

weak **be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols**. But if any man say unto you, **This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it**, and for conscience sake: **for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof** (1Co 8:4-28).

Let no man therefore judge you **in meat, or in drink**, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days (Col 2:16).

Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation (Heb 9:10).

For the kingdom of God is **not meat and drink**; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom 14:17).

1 Corinthians 10 can't be any clearer. New Testament Christians can enter the supermarket without concern for the kinds of meat being sold there. Kosher or not, all is safe when sanctified by the Word and prayer (1 Ti 4:5). The same principle applies to any who are invited to dine at someone's home. They are to consume whatever is set before them without asking questions about its origin. This is how Paul, a Jew, was able to be "all things to all men thereby saving some". No doubt this included eating with the Gentiles and sharing in all of the same foods as they in order to win them to Christ:

*And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To **them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.** ... I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1Co 9:20-22).*

Like Paul, Peter too was fond of feasting with the Gentiles. That is until he got caught doing it and came under attack by the religious Jews. Then he withdrew from his Gentile friends in hopes of winning back the confidence of his people. But he was rebuked by Paul for living hypocritically. In fact, Paul accused him of "being a Jew who lived like the Gentiles", yet was compelling others to live in accordance with the ceremonial (Levitical) commandments:

*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, **he did eat with the Gentiles**: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, **If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?** (Gal 2:11-14).*

Now in 1 Corinthians 8 we find similar instruction to what Paul writes in chapter 10 of the same book. Christians are allowed to eat food offered to idols as long as their conscience is strong enough to resist false condemnation. However, this “liberty” is not to be enjoyed around a weak brother who might attempt the same action, but without the necessary faith—leading to his detriment. Paul is clear that we must not eat or drink anything whereby we may offend an individual who is convicted differently than we are (Rom 14:15).

But some Christians insist that Paul’s dietary instructions were only meant for Gentiles, and that Jews were held to a different standard. I hope that Galatians 2:11 [examined earlier] already settled this question, but if not, notice the following passages:

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, **even as they* (Act 15:9-11).*

Peter reminds his fellow Jews that they couldn’t handle the “yoke” of the Law in respect to its many prohibitions. It was simply too burdensome. He then goes on to inform them that now God no longer “put a difference” between the Jew and Gentile. The same rule of salvation applies to both. They can only be saved through faith.

In Colossians and Hebrews we read that these Levitical ordinances were only applied until the “time of reformation”. No doubt this reformation period refers to the New Testament era and nothing else. Paul then concludes his teaching on these matters by

informing us that God's kingdom is simply not contained in what we eat or drink, but in *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost* (Rom 14:17).

In Christ,

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