

WHAT ABOUT UNCLEAN MEATS?

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Just before the Feast ... we looked at a general topic: Should we as New Testament believers even be keeping Old Testament Holy Days?

In our message ... we looked at around 4 of the New Testament passages that churches use to try to show either the Law ... or ... at least the Sabbath and Holy Days ... are “done away”. Hopefully ... we saw they say nothing of the sort.

One of the passages was Romans Chapter 14. Verses 5 and 6 talk about how one person “esteems” one day above another ... Paul said we should all aim to be “fully convinced” in our own minds.

So — they reason — we don’t need to keep the Sabbath. Any day is suitable.

I tried to show that context is critical in all of these passages ... and that the context of the whole of Romans Chapter 14 is about eating. Eating meat ... or not eating meat ... especially if it had been sacrificed to a a pagan idol.

As we are covering Romans Chapter 14 ... it reminded me that a related topic — about which we often get criticised — is not eating unclean meats. Romans Chapter 14 is often used by modern churches to (allegedly) show God has no prohibition on unclean meats.

It is some years since I last talked on this topic — but it falls into the general theme of why we follow certain Old Testament instructions — like the Sabbath and Holy Days — so it is worth a review.

If someone asks you why you don’t eat certain meats (pork ... rabbit ... lobster) ... you might be tempted to turn to Leviticus Chapter 11 ... but I’d probably not start there.

Genesis 7:1-3

1 **Then the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.**

2 **"You shall take with you seven each of every *clean animal***, a male and his female; **two each of animals that are *unclean***, a male and his female;

3 "also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth.

So — even before the Flood (2370 BC?) — 1,000 years before Moses and Leviticus — we have these 2 categories — clean and unclean animals.

No Temple ... No Priesthood etc — so no ceremonial laws?

No indication that Noah was confused? He was a righteous man. He seems to have understood the distinction.

There is no reason to think God had just suddenly decided to call pigs ... mice ... dogs ... unclean? It seems reasonable to assume animals have always fallen into those 2 categories.

Not fit for human consumption. Not fit then — and never will be.

Genesis 8 :15-20

15 Then God spoke to Noah, saying,

16 "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.

17 "Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth."

18 So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him.

19 Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, and whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark.

20 **Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every *clean animal* and of every *clean bird*, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.**

"Clean" in Hebrew: Tahor (Unclean is "not clean" = Lo Tahor).

God won't accept a sacrifice of an unclean animal or bird. They are not fit for God to "consume" either.

Genesis 9:1-3

1 So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

2 "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.

3 "**Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.**

Explicit permission to eat meat. Any meat? Dog ... horse ... elephant ... mouse?

"Even as" the green herbs (or "plants"). Are all herbs or plants good to eat? No!

Ask Socrates about hemlock! Also Deadly Nightshade ... Strychnine ... Curare — usually fatal ... plus others that cause illness or hallucinations.

So ... not all living things are good to eat even as not all green plants are good to eat.

It is most likely that Noah understood God's instructions about eating meat — he didn't need it "spelled out".

[It would have been ideal if Genesis 9:3 had said "every clean animal I have given you for food"!]]

Don't forget Genesis Chapters 1-11 is very brief. Two thousand years of human history in 11 chapters. Lots of details omitted.

So ... clean and unclean animals go way back to at least Genesis Chapter 7 ... but I would suggest they probably go all the way back to Creation.

It is not something made up in Moses day.

But what animals/birds/fish are unclean? Noah knew. Abraham probably knew.

But when Israel came out of a long period of Egyptian captivity — they had probably forgotten what clean and unclean meats were as they had been a

slave people eating what they could get their hands on. So it was clarified by Jehovah via Moses.

It is helpful to us too — otherwise we'd struggle!

Leviticus 11:1-8

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them,

2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, **'These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth:**

3 **'Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud--that you may eat.**

4 'Nevertheless these **you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves: the camel,** because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, **is unclean to you;**

5 **'the rock hyrax,** because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, **is unclean to you;**

6 **'the hare,** because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, **is unclean to you;**

7 'and **the swine,** though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, **is unclean to you.**

8 **'Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They are unclean to you.**

Verses 1-8 identify the animals (birds and fish later).

You can't eat camels ... pigs ... dogs ... cats ... mice ... rabbits ... rats ... porcupines and so on.

This chapter is not suddenly making these creatures unclean. This is identifying and clarifying.

If someone asks why you don't eat pork or shellfish ... I wouldn't start here.

The context is more about ceremonial uncleanness around God's Temple. Don't touch the carcass of an unclean animal (if Fido dies ...) ... or if you do ... you must wash and remain separate till sunset.

The next chapter talks about a woman who has recently given birth not entering the Sanctuary for several weeks.

Lots of things in Leviticus that we don't do (stoning homosexuals ... stone rebellious children ... don't wear garments of mixed fibres) ... so taking people first to Leviticus Chapter 11 (or the parallel passage in Deuteronomy Chapter 14) ... could be seen as us "picking and choosing".

We don't avoid unclean meats because of ceremonial restrictions around the Tabernacle. We avoid them because they were not fit for consumption since creation. Leviticus Chapter 11 just identifies them for us.

Eating unclean meats is not a spiritual sin — so we should be careful not to condemn people who like prawns and cat fish. 😊

Lots of "church people" do like their bacon ... lobster ... and don't want to give it up. So ... as with the Sabbath ... they try to find Biblical reasons why unclean meats are no longer unclean.

Let's look at Cornelius ... the first Gentile to be converted.

Acts 10:9-20

9 **The next day**, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, **Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.**

10 **Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance**

11 **and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.**

12 **In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.**

13 **And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."**

14 **But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."** (some years after the Crucifixion)

15 **And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."**

16 **This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.**

17 Now while **Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant**, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. **(He didn't think it meant that he could now go out and eat unclean meats)**

18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you.

20 "Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

"Common" = Koinos

"Unclean" = Akathartos

Akathartos is used in the Greek Old Testament in Genesis 7-9 ... Leviticus 11 etc. It is also used in the New Testament for unclean spirits.

Acts 10:24-29

24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.

25 As **Peter** was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.

26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.

28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. (That was Jewish culture. God didn't say it was unlawful) But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29 "Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

God said don't call any **man** common or unclean. It has nothing to do with suddenly changing the physical or biological status of unclean animals.

Then God demonstrated His acceptance of Gentiles by pouring out His Holy Spirit. (They were not Koinos or Akathartos).

Acts 11:1-18

1 Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. (That would have been quite stunning to them according to their culture)

2 And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him,

3 saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

4 But Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning, saying:

5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me.

6 "When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.

7 "And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'

8 "But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.'

9 "**But the voice answered me again from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.'**

10 "Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven.

11 "At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea.

12 "Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.

13 "And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter,

14 'who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.'

15 "And **as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.**

16 "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

17 "**If therefore God gave them (the Gentiles) the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"**

18 **When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."**

So in context ... **The vision is clearly about accepting Gentiles as equals.**

Nothing at all about suddenly making rats and snakes edible for the first time since Creation. PETER KNEW THAT FOR SURE.

Some say that Jesus made all meats clean —and if that was the case — it seems that Peter didn't know that! And they'll quote a scripture. We will look at that now.

Mark 7:1-5

1 **Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.**

2 **Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.**

3 **For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.**

4 When they come from the marketplace, (*where they may have touched a Gentile or a sinner*) they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

5 Then **the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"**

The Pharisees criticised Jesus and the disciples for not washing their hands ... ceremonially ... not for hygienic reasons.

Mark 7:8-16

8 **"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."**

9 **He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."**

10 "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

11 "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"--' (that is, a gift to God),

12 "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,

13 **"making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."**

14 **When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand:**

15 **"There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man."**

16 "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

"Nothing you eat" — like bread with ceremonially unclean hands makes you more sinful!

Mark 7:17-23

17 When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable.

18 So He said to them, "**Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 "because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"**

20 And He said, "**What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.**

21 "**For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,**

22 "thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

23 "**All these evil things come from within and defile a man."**

Wicked thoughts defile you — not food!

However ... many modern translations mis-represent Jesus' words. In verse 19 they add a full stop after the word "eliminated" and then start a new sentence ... "Thus purifying all foods". Have a look at the following translations:

Mark 7:19 (NIV)

19 For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

They alter the wording to show Mark adding a comment (Jesus made unclean meats clean ...)

The NASB ... RSV ... NET and others too.

Mark 7:19 (CEV)

19 It doesn't go into your heart, but into your stomach, and then out of your body." By saying this, Jesus meant that all foods were fit to eat.

The KJV even uses the word "meats" in verse 19 — but — it's Broma (Food).

Hopefully ... you can see the full context of Mark Chapter 7 (Matthew 15) makes it clear. Foods generally — including bread — won't defile you or make you more sinful in God's sight — whether your hands are ceremonially clean or not.

It's our thoughts and imaginations that can be offensive to God.

There is nothing remotely here about the status of rats and alligators ... they have been unclean since Creation.

Another scripture that people like to use to say we can eat anything:

1 Timothy 4:1-4

1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

4 *For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;*

Free to eat all “meats” (KJV). People say that by forbidding any meats (eg lizard pie) — we are teaching a doctrine of demons?! Therefore ... everything Moses taught and what Peter believed ... is a doctrine of demons?

1 Timothy 4 is about preachers coming with weird extreme ideas:

- Don't marry ... celibacy is superior
- Don't eat various food ... even though God created them for food

Verse 4 says foods should be received with gratitude by those who know The Truth.

Well ... John 17:17 tells us that God's Word is Truth.

Does God's Word instruct us what meats we can eat ... and which we should avoid? Yes!! Pig ... shark ... rabbit ... rat ... lobster ... horse ... ARE NOT FOODS FOR HUMANS.

Just because you can catch something ... stick it in a microwave ... doesn't make it food.

1 Timothy 4:5

5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Verse 5 ... sanctified by The Word of God. What was the Word of God in Paul's day? The Old Testament. The Old Testament sets apart the meats we can eat ... and the meats that we can't because they are unclean.

There is nothing here about eating anything we want to. Nothing here about making clean some animal that's been unclean since at least Noah's time — more than 2,000 years before.

So let's look finally at the following scripture that people use.

Romans 14:14

14 ***I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*** (Should be "common" — not "unclean")

Nothing unclean? Despite thousands of years of certain meats being unclean ... since Noah? Despite Peter's comments?

All of Romans Chapter 14 is about eating meat ... or avoiding meat. **The issue is whether it's okay to eat meat that was sacrificed to pagan gods.** Some believers were very nervous ... uncertain.

Romans 14:1-3

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

2 For **one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.**

3 **Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats;** for God has received him.

There is nothing doubtful about the Bible's teachings on unclean meats. But ... the effect of pagan sacrifices on clean meats??

The question of eating what the Bible identifies as unclean meats wouldn't even come up — everybody was familiar with that.

So ... what about verse 14?

The Greek is Koinos. It means "common" —not unclean (which is Akathartos).

Koinos is used 12 times in the New Testament (as in Mark 7 ... disciples accused of ceremonially defiled [koinos] hands). In Acts Chapter 4 ... believers had all things in common.

The word for common is never used of unclean meats. In the Greek Old Testament ... Koinos is only used 3 times (in the book of Proverbs). Never appears in Leviticus Chapter 11 or Deuteronomy Chapter 4.

Translating Koinos in Romans 14:14 as “unclean” looks like a mistranslation — perhaps even deliberate?

Very few translations seem faithful to the Greek.

Romans 14:14 (NEW MATTHEW BIBLE)

14 **For I know and am fully assured in the Lord Jesus that there is nothing common of itself. But for him who judges it to be common, to him it is common.**

Romans 14:14 (ROTHERHAM EMPHASISED)

14 **I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus—that, nothing, is profane of itself,—save to him who reckoneth anything to be profane, unto that man, [it is] profane.**

This is in context. Paul was dealing with clean meats — edible meats — which some feared were defiled or profaned because they’d come from pagan temples.

Perfectly okay to eat them. But:

- Don’t eat if you’re doubtful
- Don’t eat in front of another believer who’s doubtful

Those are the main scriptures people turn to — Acts 10 ... Mark 7 ... I Timothy 4 ... Romans 14. In context none of them transform rats and pigs into acceptable foods thousands of years after Creation!

Revelation 18:1-2 (right at the end of the story — at Jesus’ return)

1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.

2 And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, (*Akathartos*) and **a cage for every unclean and hated bird!** (*"Unclean" ... Akathartos*).

So ... at the time of Jesus' return we still have unclean birds (and animals too ... surely).

So ... consistent from Genesis to Revelation.

We're not just picking and choosing some random verses from Leviticus! It's a Bible Truth!

Others can eat snake pie and roast raccoon if they want. We're better though to stick with God's approved foods!