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Clean vs. Unclean Animals

Between my ministry and my natural health practice,¹ I have often been asked to help decipher what most people consider to be a difficult-to-understand set of rules and regulations regarding what God considers to be “clean” and “unclean” food animals. This is information that I originally prepared for a talk that I gave at an herb conference in 2003. I hope that it helps to “de-mystify” the issue and helps you to understand why God has provided these restrictions for our protection.

Most of Christianity has generally concluded that the food restrictions in the Torah—the first five books of the so-called “Old Testament”—no longer apply. This view rests on an *incorrect interpretation* of what the Apostles wrote about “clean” and “unclean” foods in the Apostolic Letters, the so-called “New Testament.” If God never changes and the entire Bible is His Word, how can something considered “unclean” in the Hebrew Bible later be considered “clean” in the Apostolic Letters?

The belief by Christians that they are free to eat anything they want is based primarily on the following passages:

I know—that is, I have been persuaded by the Lord Yeshua the Messiah—that nothing is unclean in itself. But if a person considers something unclean, then for him it is unclean; and if your brother is being upset by the food you eat, your life is no longer one of love. Do not, by your eating habits, destroy someone for whom the Messiah died! Do not let what you know to be good, be spoken of as bad; for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom, and joy in the Ruach HaKodesh. Anyone who serves the Messiah in this fashion both pleases God and wins the approval of other people. So then, let us pursue the things that make for shalom and mutual upbuilding. Don't tear down God's work for the sake of food. True enough, all things are clean; but it is wrong for anybody by his eating to cause someone to fall away. What is good is not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The belief you hold about such things, keep between yourself and God. Happy the person who is free of self-condemnation when he approves of something! But the doubter comes under condemnation if he eats, because his action is not based on trust. And anything not based on trust is a sin. (Rom. 14:14-23, CJB)

In this section of his letter to the Messianic Believers in Rome, Rebbe Sha'ul² was not discussing whether certain foods themselves are Kosher, but rather whether a Believer has the right to judge his brother on whether that brother eats Kosher. His argument is *not* that all things are acceptable to be eaten, but that an individual must answer to God, not to men, regarding his choices. Additionally,

¹ My wife was a clinical nutritionist, and I am a Certified Natural Health Professional and completed all the didactic portion of a Naturopathic Doctor program. Together we operated a natural health and counselling ministry for about 20 years. When she went to be with the Lord in 2008, I closed the practice and dropped out of the clinical portion of the ND program.

² The Hebrew name of Rabbi Saul (*aka* Paul) of Tarsus.

from other writings of Rav Sha'ul, particularly First Corinthians chapter 8 (below), we can know that he is speaking of *ritually* clean and unclean. Just because you don't wash your hands in the specific *ritual* manner prescribed by the Pharisees does not make the food that you are eating unclean, nor does the fact that you bought your meat from other than a Kosher butcher make the food unclean.

Now about food sacrificed to idols: we know that, as you say, "We all have knowledge." Yes, that is so, but "knowledge" puffs a person up with pride; whereas love builds up. The person who thinks he "knows" something doesn't yet know in the way he ought to know. However, if someone loves God, God knows him. So, as for eating food sacrificed to idols, we "know" that, as you say, "An idol has no real existence in the world, and there is only one God." For even if there are so-called "gods," either in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are "gods" and "lords" galore—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things come and for whom we exist; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, through whom were created all things and through whom we have our being. But not everyone has this knowledge. Moreover, some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat food which has been sacrificed to them, they think of it as really affected by the idol; and their consciences, being weak, are thus defiled. Now food will not improve our relationship with God—we will be neither poorer if we abstain nor richer if we eat. However watch out that your mastery of the situation does not become a stumbling block to the weak. You have this "knowledge"; but suppose someone with a weak conscience sees you sitting, eating a meal in the temple of an idol. Won't he be built up wrongly to eat this food which has been sacrificed to idols? Thus by your "knowledge" this weak person is destroyed, this brother for whom the Messiah died; and so, when you sin against the brothers by wounding their conscience when it is weak, you are sinning against the Messiah! To sum up, if food will be a snare for my brother, I will never eat meat again, lest I cause my brother to sin. (1Cor. 8:1-13, CJB)

Are All Foods Clean?

I found this interesting discussion at
<http://jesusisajew.org/Short/MK7V19.php>
(accessed April 5, 2014)

At the end of Mark 7:19 most Bible translations say, "Thus He declared all foods clean." So it's pretty clear that Yeshua ("Jesus") changed the old food regulations in Leviticus 11, and it's OK to eat pork, shellfish, or whatever we want, right?

The most important clue for understanding any passage in the Bible is to check the context. In this case, it's given in Mark 7:1-5 where Yeshua is asked, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the Tradition of the Elders, but eat their bread with unwashed hands?" (v.5).

Notice two things: first, the question isn't about the Torah ("Law"), but about a tradition. Second, it's not a question about *what* may be eaten. It's about whether one may eat *at all* without a ritual hand-washing.

That explains why Yeshua responded by saying, "Neglecting the Commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men," (v.8) and "You have a fine way of setting aside the Commandment of God in order to keep your tradition" (v. 9).

So then, could verses 18-19 have Yeshua *setting aside* a commandment of God when up until that point He had been criticizing the Pharisees for that very thing (vv. 8,9,13)?

And could verses 18-19 have Yeshua talking about a commandment at all, when up until that point His subject had been a “Tradition of the Elders” (vv. 3,4,5,8,9,13)?

Lastly, could verses 18-19 suddenly be about *food* when up until that point the subject had been ritual *hand-washing* (vv. 2,3,4,5)? *Obviously not*. This is made even clearer by comparing the same discussion as reported by Matthew (15:1-20). Yeshua concludes by saying, “but to eat *with unwashed hands* does not defile the man.”

Because the subject of Mark 7:1-19 isn’t Kashrut (Biblical diet), it cannot be about *abolishing* Kashrut either. Ok, but why do so many translations* seem to say that it is?

Again consider the context, but in this case the *social* context. This discussion took place in a social and historical context different than our own. Language and practice were based on the Word of God. For instance, their holidays were those days set apart in the Bible for special observance, not ours. Their property rights were those of the Bible, not ours. Likewise, only those things that are not *taw-may* (“defiled”, “unclean”) were considered *food*, everything else was not. Reading Mark 7:19 as *they* would have, it means, “Thus He declared *all things-given-by-God* as food to be clean, *regardless of ritual hand washing*.”

*Although there are many minor textual differences between source documents of the New Covenant, it is very rare that a variance significantly affects meaning. Mark 7:18-19 is one of these rare passages. The difference of a single letter (Omicron or Omega) determines gender for the word “purging, making clean” near the end of v.19 (*katharizon*). If the word’s gender is neuter (written with the Omicron), it attaches to “stomach,” and is speaking of the digestive process. (See the King James Version, for instance.) But for translators who believe the word’s gender is masculine (written with the Omega), it must look all the way back to the “He” (Yeshua) at the beginning of verse 18 for its masculine subject. For the sake of clarity, these translators insert a phrase that *never appears* in the Greek: “*Thus He declared*.”

Regardless of which manuscripts and translations are correct, this article attempts to show that Mark 7:1-19 is NOT an instance of Divine self-correction, by assuming the most difficult case, “*Thus He declared* all foods clean.”

“All Foods” vs. “Everything”

Did Yeshua *actually* declare “all foods clean” in Mark 7:19, meaning that we are now free to eat anything we want, instantly nullifying the very Torah that He gave to Israel through Moshe?

For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and it passes out into the latrine.” (Thus he declared all foods *ritually* clean.) (Mark 7:19, CJB; emphasis added)

Did He teach that *all food* is cleansed by passing through the intestinal tract as some interpreters teach? Or did He simply, as the *Complete Jewish Bible* translates the verse, declare all foods *ritually* clean whether the hands have been washed using the complex hand-washing *ritual* of the Pharisees? If the latter was His intent, as I am convinced it was, then what He *actually* taught was that not washing your hands in the complex ritual of the Pharisees does not render *kosher food* ritually unclean.

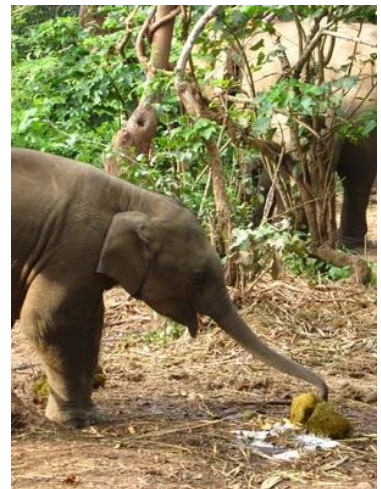
Whatever the case, “*all food*” is not the same as “*everything*.”

Baby Elephant Food

Let us consider for just a moment what is “food” to a baby elephant. Baby elephants are born with no bacteria in their intestinal tract, so before they’re ready to move on to eating solids they first must start their culture, usually by borrowing some microbes from their mother. In fact, their first solid meal is, in most cases, a mouthful of their mother’s dung. After a year or two of regularly eating their mother’s dung, they have enough beneficial bacteria in their intestines that they can readily digest their normal solid food.

To the first century Jews to whom Yeshua was speaking, *all* “unclean” animals were the same as “baby elephant food” – not “food” at all!!!

We can go a long way to resolving this apparent conflict if we can just remember that the Apostles were *all* Jewish Rabbis who carefully observed the *entire* Torah that applied to them (not all *mitzvot* [commandments] apply to all classes of individual), that the only “Scripture” they had was the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible, or so-called “Old Testament”), that their target audience was overwhelmingly Jewish, and that the Jewish people have never considered anything on the “unclean” list to be included in the definition of “food.” If the Apostle was ever discussing “food,” he was talking *only* about those plants and animals on the “clean” list, *never* those animals on the “unclean” list—they simply were not “food.”



Then God said, “Here! Throughout the whole earth I am giving you as food every seed-bearing plant and every tree with seed-bearing fruit. And to every wild animal, bird in the air and creature crawling on the earth, in which there is a living soul, I am giving as food every kind of green plant.” And that is how it was. (Gen. 1:29-30, CJB)

ADONAI said to Moshe and Aharon, “Tell the people of Isra'el, ‘These are the living creatures which you may among all the land animals: any that has a separate hoof which is completely divided and chews the cud—these animals you may eat. But you are not to eat those that only chew the cud or only have a separate hoof. For example, the camel, the coney, and the hare are unclean for you, because they chew the cud but don't have a separate hoof; while the pig is unclean for you, because, although it has a separate and completely divided hoof, it doesn't chew the cud. You are not to eat meat from these or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

“Of all the things that live in the water, you may eat these: anything in the water that has fins and scales, whether in seas or rivers—these you may eat. But everything in the seas and rivers without both fins and scales, of all the small water-creatures and of all the living creatures in the water, is a detestable thing for you. Yes, these will be detestable for you—you are not to eat their meat, and you are to detest their carcasses. Whatever lack fins and scales in the water is a detestable thing for you.

“The following creatures of the air are to be detestable for you—they are not to be eaten, they are a detestable thing: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, the kite, the various kinds of buzzards, the various kinds of ravens, the ostrich, the screech-owl, the seagull, the various kinds of hawks, the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl, the horned owl, the pelican, the barn owl, the stork, the various kinds of herons, the hoopoe, and the bat.³

“All winged swarming creatures that go about on all fours are a detestable thing for you; except that of all winged swarming creatures that go on all fours, you may eat those that have jointed legs above their feet, enabling them to jump off the ground. Specifically, of these you may eat the various kinds of locusts, grasshoppers, katydids, and crickets. But other than that, all winged swarming creatures having four feet are a detestable thing for you. ...

“The following are unclean for you among the small creatures that swarm on the ground: the weasel, the mouse, the various kinds of lizards, the gecko, the land crocodile, the skink, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. ...

“Any creature that swarms on the ground is a detestable thing; it is not to be eaten—whatever moves on its stomach, goes on all fours, or has many legs—all creatures that swarm on the ground; you are not to eat them because they are a detestable thing.” (Leviticus 11:1-42, CJB)

ADONAI said to Aharon the priest: “... you will distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; ...” (Lev. 10:10) God was not nearly as concerned with *ritual purity* in the dietary instructions as He was with *physical* cleanliness or uncleanness.

The table below tabulates the results of a 1953 study in which Dr. David Macht of Johns Hopkins University reported the toxic effects of animal flesh on a controlled growth culture. A substance was classified as toxic if it slowed the culture's growth rate below 75 percent. In each case, the *blood* of all the animals Dr. Macht tested showed up more toxic than the flesh. [“It is to be a permanent regulation through all your generations wherever you live that you will eat neither fat nor blood.” (Lev. 3:17, NAS)]

The table ... is based on Dr. Macht's study. The results show that *the lower the growth percentage of the culture, the more toxic the flesh*. Note that the animals and fish given to us by God for food are all nontoxic, but all forbidden animals lie in the toxic range. (Animals without percentage rankings in the chart were not studied, but are included here to provide a more comprehensive list of clean and unclean meats.)

³ They are either scavengers, or they eat shellfish, rodents, or reptiles, all of which are “unclean.”

Don't get confused! Any number above 75 percent is nontoxic, or clean.

This chart should make it easy for us to identify which meats we should choose to eat. It also makes it apparent we are eating many toxic substances that were not created for food.

The differences between clean and unclean animals appear to be related to their primary food source and to their digestive systems. Scavengers that eat anything and everything are unclean, not suitable for food, according to the Bible. Animals described as clean, and therefore good for food, primarily eat grasses and grains.

This examination of clean and unclean flesh could be a more revealing study considering today's modern toxicological technology. A loving God protects His people by showing them just which foods are safe. He summarizes His will in Leviticus 11:43: *"Do not defile by any of these creatures. Do not make yourselves unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them."* ...

Note that an animal doesn't have to be a scavenger to be unclean. Horses and rabbits, for example, are unclean because they do not have split hooves. Although they are considered to be good food in some countries, studies have shown that horse meat often contains viruses and parasites. Rabbits, as innocent as they appear, are the cause of tularemia (an infectious disease) in humans. ...

One reason for God's rule forbidding pork is that the digestive system of a pig is completely different from that of a cow. It is similar to ours, in that the stomach is very acidic. 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 protective barrier. Parasites, bacteria, viruses, and toxins can pass into the pig's flesh because of overeating. These toxins and infectious agents can be passed on to humans when they eat a pig's flesh. ...

In *Biblical Archeological Review*, Jane Cahill examined the toilets of a Jewish household in Jerusalem, finding no parasites nor infectious agents, but only pollen from the many fruits, vegetables and herbs they had eaten. A similar study about Egyptians revealed eggs from *Schistosoma*, *Trichinella*, wire worm and tapeworms, all found in pork. All of these organisms cause significant chronic diseases.

(Compiled from Russell, Rex, MD. *What the Bible Says About Healthy Living*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1999, pp. 76-78.)

A pdf version of this article may be downloaded from messianiclearning.org/downloads/CleanVsUncleanAnimals.pdf. See also "Pig and Pork Facts."

Clean and Unclean Meats

(Any number below 75% is toxic — See text for explanation)

Four-Footed Animals			
CLEAN (Cloven-hoofed, cud-chewing)		UNCLEAN (All Others)	
calf	82%	black bear	59%
deer	98%	camel	41%
goat	90%	cat	62%
ox	91%	coney (guinea pig)	46%
sheep	94%	dog	62%
		fox (silver)	58%
		grizzly bear	55%
		ground hog	53%
		hamster	46%
		horse	39%
		opossum	53%
		rabbit	49%
		rat	55%
		rhinoceros	60%
		squirrel	43%
		swine (pigs/hogs)	54%

Flying Animals			
CLEAN		UNCLEAN	
goose	85%	bat	
chicken	83%	cormorant	
coot	88%	crow	46%
duck	98%	eagle	
pigeon	93%	falcon	
quail	89%	hawk	
swan	87%	heron	
turkey	85%	ibis	
		kite	
		nighthawk	
		osprey	
		ostrich	
		owl	62%
		pelican	
		raven	
		red-tail hawk	36%
		sparrow hawk	36%
		sea gull	
		stork	
		vulture	

Water Creatures			
CLEAN (With scales and fins)		UNCLEAN (Without scales and fins)	
black bass	80%	catfish	48%
black drum	105%	clams	
bluefish	80%	crabs	
carp	90%	eel	40%
channel bass	80%	lobster	
chub	91%	octopus	
cod	98%	oysters	
croaker	90%	porcupine fish	60%
flounder	83%	puffer	51%
flying fish	87%	sand skate	59%
goldfish	88%	scallops	
haddock	80%	shark (dogfish)	62%
hake	98%	shrimp	
halibut	82%	squid	
herring	100%	stingray	46%
kingfish	83%	toad fish	49%
mullet	87%		
pike	98%		
pompano	110%		
porgy	80%		
rainbow trout	81%		
rock bass	100%		
salmon	81%		
smelt	90%		
sea bass	103%		
shad	100%		
Spanish mackerel	98%		
spot	80%		
surgeon	87%		
tuna (bluefin)	88%		
white perch	81%		
whiting, Carolina	84%		
yellow perch	87%		

Insects	
CLEAN (Winged, with jointed hopping legs) cricket grasshopper katydid locust	UNCLEAN (All others)