

# Understanding the Foundations

## Chapter 7

### *Son... That's Not Food*

OK... It's finally time to wrestle with the toughest question in the Bible...  
***"What's for lunch?"*** I'm not kidding... we can talk Bible all day but the moment you mention food... things can get rough! So let's not talk about food just yet. The real issue is the concept of what is "clean" and what is "unclean."

In our culture we think of clean and unclean as physical matters. "Unclean" can range from dirty like a pair of muddy shoes to "foul" like a rotting corpse filled with maggots. Biblically, clean and unclean is pretty much the same thing except on a spiritual level. People often think that the concept of clean and unclean were introduced with the Law but that is not the case. The first mention of it is in Genesis 7 when God commanded Noah to bring the animals into the ark.

*Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate... Genesis 7:2 (ESV)*

And the concept of Clean and Unclean are not limited to the Old Testament either.

*<sup>10</sup> And he [the Angel] carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal... <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*  
Revelation 21:10-11, 27 (ESV)

Since "the unclean" will not enter heaven, we need to be sure that we have a clear understanding of the Biblical concept of clean vs unclean. This subject of 'clean' and 'unclean' is much broader than just food, but since we are discussing food in this chapter, let's quickly review what foods the scriptures define as clean and unclean in Leviticus 11.

|                        | Clean  | Unclean  |
|------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Animals</b>         | Both cloven hoofs and chewing the cud<br>Cow, Sheep, Goat, Deer, Buffalo         | Pigs, Camels, Horses, Rabbits, Dogs, Possum, etc.<br>(and clean animals that died on their own or were torn by beasts) |
| <b>Water</b>           | Creatures with both fins and scales<br>Tuna, Trout, Red Snapper, Perch, Flounder | Catfish, Shrimp, Lobster, Eels, Squid, Shark, Crawfish   |
| <b>Birds</b>           | Chicken, Pheasant, Quail, Turkey   | Predators and Scavengers<br>Eagle, Hawk, Vulture, Owl, Crow, Sea Gull  |
| <b>Insects</b>         | Hopping Insects with Jointed Legs<br>Grasshopper, Locust, Cricket                | Flying & Walking Insects   |
| <b>Creeping Things</b> | None   | Snakes, Lizards, Snails, Worms, Frogs, Toads, Alligator, Mice, etc.  |

Reading Leviticus 11 reminds me of when my children and grandchildren first began to crawl. Anything and everything they could reach went straight into their mouths. Teaching them what was food and what was not food was a long and slow process. Similarly, God tells us, “*Son, that’s not food*” but, like my kids, we think we know better than He does.



To complicate the issue, there are many verses in the New Testament that, taken out of context, seem to prove that the concept of Clean and Unclean foods has been done away with. The passages are hard to understand because we have all been taught this is their meaning since we were children. However, when we start to examine them closely, it becomes obvious that things are not as obvious as they seem.

Therefore, let’s jump straight to the verses that appear the most obvious.

## All Foods Declared Clean – Mark 7

And He [Jesus] said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? **Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?**” **(Thus, He declared all foods clean.)** Mark 7:18-19 (ESV)

There it is in plain English... **case closed!**

I agree... by itself, it looks totally clear. Yet we must always examine the context of verses like this. In this case, this encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees is also recorded in the gospel of Matthew so we can examine this verse in the context of both accounts.

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| <p><sup>1</sup> Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.”</p> <p><sup>3</sup> He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ <sup>5</sup> But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” <sup>6</sup> he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: <sup>8</sup> “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as</p> | <p><sup>1</sup> Now when the Pharisees gathered to Him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> they saw that some of His disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. <sup>3</sup> (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, <sup>4</sup> and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) <sup>5</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”</p> <p><sup>6</sup> And He said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ <sup>8</sup> You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” <sup>9</sup> And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the</p> |
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doctrines the commandments of men.’”

<sup>10</sup> And He called the people to Him and said to them, “Hear and understand: <sup>11</sup> it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.”

<sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” <sup>13</sup> He answered, “Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

<sup>15</sup> But Peter said to Him, “Explain the parable to us.”

<sup>16</sup> And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup> Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? <sup>18</sup> But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

Matthew 15:1-20 (ESV)

commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ <sup>11</sup> But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— <sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, <sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.” <sup>14</sup> And He called the people to Him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

<sup>17</sup> And when He had entered the house and left the people, His disciples asked Him about the parable. <sup>18</sup> And He said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup> since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” **(Thus, He declared all foods clean.)** <sup>20</sup> And He said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, <sup>22</sup> coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Mark 7:1-15, 17-23 (ESV)

It is very tempting to say, “Look, the part of verse 19 in Mark that says, ‘*Thus He declared all foods clean*’ is not in the Matthew account so maybe a copiest slipped it in later.” That is possible because there are variations in the Greek manuscripts. For example, notice that verse 16 is not even included in most translations. However, I avoid this approach to scripture study because it is very dangerous when people start chopping out whatever they don’t understand – or don’t agree with! So let’s wrestle with it as it stands.

First, what is the context of this verse? The Pharisees had come to listen to Jesus and, while they were there, they noticed that His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. This offended them and they asked Jesus. “*Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?*” They weren’t talking using soap and water to scrub off dirt and germs. They had a tradition that, before you could eat, you would hold out your hands and have someone pour water over them. Jesus responded by telling them how offensive some of their other traditions were to God because they replaced His commandments with their own. Thus, rather than throwing aside the commandments of God, Jesus affirms them.

*17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.*

The last verse in the Matthew account makes it clear that, Jesus was not talking about what kind of food someone is eating. He was explaining that eating with “unwashed hands” did not defile food that was already clean. But what do we do with the statement, **(Thus, He declared all foods clean)**? That’s a problem because, it shows that sometimes things are translated in ways that are more acceptable to people than accurate. This is a strange phrase in the Greek:

|         |      |              |           |             |            |         |        |         |      |         |
|---------|------|--------------|-----------|-------------|------------|---------|--------|---------|------|---------|
| 3754    | 3756 | 1531         | 846       | 1519        | 3588       | 2588    | 235    | 1519    | 3588 | 2836    |
| hoti    | ouk  | eisporeuetai | autou     | eis         | tēn        | kardian | all'   | eis     | tēn  | koilian |
| ὅτι     | οὐκ  | εἰσπορεύεται | αὐτοῦ     | εἰς         | τὴν        | καρδίαν | , ἀλλ' | εἰς     | τὴν  | κοιλίαν |
| because | not  | it enters    | of him    | into        | the        | heart   | but    | into    | the  | belly   |
|         |      |              |           |             |            |         |        |         |      |         |
| 2532    | 1519 | 3588         | 856       | 1607        | 2511       | 3956    | 3588   | 1033    |      |         |
| kai     | eis  | ton          | aphedrōna | ekporeuetai | katharizōn | panta   | ta     | brōmata |      |         |
| καὶ     | εἰς  | τὸν          | ἀφεδρῶνα  | ἐκπορεύεται | καθαρίζων  | πάντα   | τὰ     | βρώματα |      |         |
| and     | into | the          | draught   | goes out    | purifying  | all     | the    | food    |      |         |

We can debate what “*purifying all the food*” means, but it definitely does not straight up say, “*Thus, He declared all foods clean.*”

*A Few Thoughts on Bible Translations*

While the *ESV* translation is usually very good, this verse demonstrates a problem with all translations. What you see in English is what the translators think the passage says. Bible Translations range from very literal like *Youngs Literal Translation* to very loose paraphrases such as *The Living Bible* or *The Message*. Many people like the paraphrases because they are “easier to understand.” Unfortunately, with paraphrases, you are not reading the scriptures... you are reading that author’s opinion about what a scripture means. In the first comparison, *The Message* says pretty much the same as the *ESV*. However, in the second example, the author’s opinions have led him to significantly and intentionally alter the text removing its stern warning. Deliberately tampering with the meaning of scripture like this is an extremely serious matter. [Ezekiel 3:16-21]

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Matthew 5:14-16 - English Standard Version  | The Message  |
| "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.   | "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand - shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. |
| 1 Corinthians 6:8-10 - ESV  | The Message  |
| But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers! Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. | All you're doing is providing fuel for more wrong, more injustice, bringing more hurt to the people of your own spiritual family. Don't you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don't care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom.  |

Reading the same passage in several translations can be helpful. The different wording of one version may shed light on something that you didn’t see in another. However, as we have already seen several times, even the best translations may be heavily influenced by what is considered “acceptable.” I have even seen one popular translation change over the past 40 years to be more politically correct. This trend will likely increase as people become less tolerant of correction.

*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions... 2 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)*

As we stated in the first chapter, we must interpret every scripture by the rest of the scriptures and not by popular opinion. God does not change nor does He change His mind about things. [Numbers 23:19] If one scripture seems to contradict another, we are either misunderstanding it or we need to keep digging until we find the source of the apparent contradiction.

### **Nothing is Unclean – Romans 14**

As promised in the last chapter, we are returning to Romans 14 to examine what it says about clean and unclean food. Taken by itself verse 14 is a blockbuster.

***I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.***

That looks simple enough. If you think it is OK to eat pork, shrimp, catfish and such then – ***for you*** – it is fine. However, if I think we should obey the dietary laws of the Old Testament, then it would be a sin for me to eat it. Therefore, it is my opinions that determine what is sin and what is not. That is a very popular theology today because our culture rejects any absolute standard of right and wrong. Strangely, there is some truth in that error. If choose to do something that I believe is sinful (even if it not) then I am sinning. My sin is not the act that I did but my decision to intentionally violate what I believed the will of God to be. However, if I do something sinful, it is still sinful even if I think it is OK. If I truly did it in ignorance, the consequences may be less severe, but it is still sin because God’s Word defines what is right and wrong – not my preferences.

This verse is actually difficult even for careful readers seeking to understand it in context because Paul never explicitly says what he is talking about. His meaning was obvious to the original readers in Rome because they were in the middle of a raging debate. The debate was so hot that Paul’s uses terms like “pass judgement,” “despise” and “destroy the work of God.” However, two thousand years later, we must do some digging to figure out what situation Paul was addressing.

### **Quarreling Over Opinions?**

Romans 14 sounds like Paul is saying that it doesn’t really matter what you believe so long as you are fully convinced of it [verse 5] and that we just need to focus on

getting along with each other [verse 19]. That doesn't sound like Paul... unless the issue being so hotly debated really wasn't important and that the main problem was people being at war with each other. Since the first verse says we should not "*quarrel over opinions*" the debate is about something other than God's Laws or principals of faith.

But what problem is Paul addressing? Our clue is the statement, "*One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.*" This statement doesn't make sense if the debate was whether or not we can eat unclean foods. If "*eat anything*" meant eating unclean meats like pork, the "weak brother" would not need to "only eat vegetables." He could simply eat clean meats like beef or lamb. Since the "weak brother" eats only vegetables, we might guess that he believed people shouldn't eat meat at all. However, rather than guessing based on our culture, we should use scripture to interpret scripture. Fortunately, Paul also wrote a letter to the church in Corinth which explains who the "weak brother" is and why he only eats vegetables. So, let's review both passages together.

| Romans 14:1-23 (ESV)   | 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 (ESV)   |
|--|--|
| <p><i><sup>1</sup> As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.</i></p> <p><i><sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. <sup>8</sup> For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then,</i></p> | <p><i><sup>1</sup> Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup> If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.</i></p> <p><i><sup>4</sup> Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." <sup>5</sup> For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many</i></p> |



whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.<sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

<sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. <sup>14</sup> **I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.** <sup>15</sup> For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. **By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.** <sup>16</sup> So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. <sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. <sup>19</sup> So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

<sup>20</sup> **Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.** Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.

<sup>21</sup> **It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.** <sup>22</sup> The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. <sup>23</sup> But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

"lords"—<sup>6</sup> yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

<sup>7</sup> However, not all possess this knowledge. **But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.** <sup>8</sup> **Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.**

<sup>9</sup> But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the **weak**. <sup>10</sup> For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is **weak**, to eat food offered to idols? <sup>11</sup> **And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.** <sup>12</sup> Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is **weak**, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> **Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.**

In Greece and Rome, vast numbers of animals were sacrificed at the pagan temples. Then the meat was cooked so people could eat it as an act of worship to their gods. The meat that wasn't eaten in the temples was sold in the marketplace so almost all the meat available in cities like Rome and Corinth had been sacrificed to an idol. This is not a small concern because God Himself said,

*You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you - for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God - lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and He destroy you from off the face of the earth.* Deuteronomy 6:14-15 (ESV)

We must never... **EVER**... take part in any form of worship to any other god. Therefore, believers in these cities had a major problem trying to get meat.

Some believers, however, reasoned that since idols were not real gods and they were just having a good meal - not worshiping that false god, then it didn't matter that the meat had been offered to a false god. This is the "knowledge" Paul refers to in his letter to the believers in Corinth. However, many in the Corinthian church were arrogant, lived very carelessly and even took pride in being "tolerant" of sin.

*<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.* 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (ESV)

Paul said that those who had this "knowledge" became "puffed up" by it. They were as comfortable eating in pagan temples as we are at a restaurant. The trouble with them eating in the pagan temples is that unbelievers and new believers viewed this as saying it was OK for Christians to worship other gods. And these temples were not just a fancy steak houses, they were also filled with every kind of sin from drunkenness to prostitution.

Paul agrees that idols are nothing and eating food sacrificed to idols doesn't hurt us. When he says *"I know and am persuaded **in the Lord Jesus** that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean"* (Romans 14:14) he is referencing the passages in Matthew and Mark that we looked at earlier where Jesus says, *"Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?"*

But, why is the “weak brother” weak? Sin is addictive. Drugs, alcohol, sex and gambling are incredibly addictive and utterly destroy millions of lives. The “weak brother” has been addicted to the stuff that goes on at the pagan temples. [1 Cor 8:7] Inviting him to go there for dinner with you is like inviting someone who is addicted to gambling to join you for dinner at a casino. If they get sucked back into idol worship and are destroyed by it, the blame for their fall will be on you. In truth, those who live carelessly and hang around the edges of sin will soon be recaptured by it as well. The churches in both Pergamum and Thyatira were condemned in the book of Revelation for this. [Revelation 2:14, 20]

### *Peter’s Vision – Acts 10*

The scripture that everyone points to as proof that the dietary laws of the Torah have been done away with is Peter’s vision in Acts 10. The portion that is normally quoted is:

*<sup>9</sup> The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. <sup>10</sup> And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, **he fell into a trance** <sup>11</sup> and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> And there came a voice to him: “**Rise, Peter; kill and eat.**” <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, “**By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.**” <sup>15</sup> And the voice came to him again a second time, “**What God has made clean, do not call common.**” <sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.*

The first thing that I notice is that, if Jesus had truly said that it was OK to eat all foods in Mark 7, then Peter must not have been listening. The usual interpretation of this passage is that God was declaring that all foods were now clean. However, if we simply read the whole passage the scripture will explain itself. This is a long passage but it is best to read it in context.

*<sup>1</sup> At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, <sup>2</sup> a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. <sup>3</sup> About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, “Cornelius.” <sup>4</sup> And he stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” And he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. <sup>5</sup> And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. <sup>6</sup> He*

is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.”<sup>7</sup> When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him,<sup>8</sup> and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

<sup>9</sup> The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.<sup>10</sup> And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance<sup>11</sup> and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth.<sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air.<sup>13</sup> And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”<sup>14</sup> But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”<sup>15</sup> And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.”<sup>16</sup> This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

<sup>17</sup> Now while **Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean**, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon’s house, stood at the gate<sup>18</sup> and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there.<sup>19</sup> And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you.<sup>20</sup> Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.”<sup>21</sup> And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?”<sup>22</sup> And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.”<sup>23</sup> So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him.<sup>24</sup> And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.<sup>25</sup> When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.<sup>26</sup> But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”<sup>27</sup> And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered.<sup>28</sup> And he said to them, **“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.**<sup>29</sup> So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

<sup>30</sup> And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing <sup>31</sup> and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. <sup>32</sup> Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ <sup>33</sup> So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

<sup>34</sup> So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. <sup>36</sup> As for the word that He sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), <sup>37</sup> you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree, <sup>40</sup> but God raised Him on the third day and made Him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.”

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. <sup>46</sup> For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, <sup>47</sup> “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” <sup>48</sup> And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Acts 10:1-48 (ESV)

Peter says that the vision was not about food at all. It was about understanding God’s view of Clean and Unclean. When Peter said that it is *“unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation...”* that was not God’s Law, the Torah but rather another tradition of the elders. This tradition directly contradicts The Torah which says in many places that His people must treat foreigners with kindness and respect.

<sup>33</sup> *“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.*  
<sup>34</sup> *You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.* Leviticus 19:33-34 (ESV)

Nevertheless, when you have lived all your life with racial hatred that is even approved and encouraged by the religious leaders, it may take divine intervention to break that within you. Peter is often portrayed in sermons as bumbling, loudmouthed and not too bright. But, unlike the seminary trained experts who criticize him, Peter understood exactly what the Holy Spirit was telling him and obeyed immediately.

Later on, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, the church was shocked (and some were offended) to hear that gentiles were coming into the faith. When Peter retold the story to them, he didn't say, *“Hey guys... they served the most awesome bacon-wrapped shrimp... Thank God we are free of the Law now so we can have good food!”* Instead, he told them of the genuineness of Cornelius' conversion and said, *“...who was I that I could stand in God's way?”* *When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”* Acts 11:17-18 (ESV)

### *So How Do People Miss The Obvious?*

If the interpretation of this vision is so obvious, why do the “experts” get it wrong? Well, like I said, the minute you start talking about the Biblical view of food, things can get really ugly. If someone says they are following the new XYZ diet and that you should too, you nod respectfully. But if you say that we should follow the Old Testament dietary laws, you will instantly be branded a legalist and a Judaizer. That is no fun and, for a pastor, it could result in a sudden change of employment. It is much safer to go with tradition... After all... The Creator of the Universe couldn't really care what we eat for lunch! ***Could He?***

### *Are the Dietary Laws Just About Health?*

Some people try to explain the Levitical dietary laws in terms of health concerns. For example, the pig is infamous for being a carrier of Trichina worms that can be transmitted to people by eating inadequately cooked pork. Likewise, catfish, crabs and shrimp eat whatever they find rotting at the bottom while vultures eat dead and rotting corpses. If we say that the dietary laws were just to keep Israel healthy, they are no longer needed since we have proper cooking and sanitation. Such reasoning is plausible but, after God lists the clean and unclean animals, He says,

<sup>43</sup> *You shall not make yourselves detestable... you shall not defile yourselves with them, and become unclean through them.* <sup>44</sup> ***For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.*** Leviticus 11:41-47 (ESV)

Notice God doesn't say, "you shall not make yourself sick by them." Rather, He says that eating these things makes you unclean, defiled and detestable – **to Him**. Of course, there are many things besides eating unclean animals that will make you unclean and therefore detestable. In the previous passage we examined, Jesus said that "*evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness*" will defile us. Eating unclean animals may seem like a trivial sin, but I don't want to deliberately embrace anything in my life that causes me to be "unclean" before God.

Many people have vague ideas of what it means to be "Holy." Often these ideas are rather negative pictures of people with halos and a "too good for you" attitude. But "Holy" means "set apart to God. Notice how many times the concept of separation is used in this one short passage.

<sup>24</sup> *...I am the LORD your God, who has **separated** you from the peoples.* <sup>25</sup> *You shall therefore **separate** the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have **set apart** for you to hold unclean.* <sup>26</sup> ***You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.*** Leviticus 20:24-26 (ESV)

God says that ***we are to be like Him*** separating clean from unclean because He separated us from the peoples of the world to be His.

### ***Why Does Eating Unclean Food Make Us Detestable to God?***

***"But,"*** you may ask, ***"Why does eating 'unclean' foods make us detestable before God?"*** To answer that question, let's look at two Old Testament stories about food. Paul says that, "*...these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did...*" 1 Corinthians 10:6 (ESV)

First, consider the blessing God placed upon Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

<sup>28</sup> *And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."* <sup>29</sup> *And God said, "**Behold, I have given you** every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for*

food... <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Genesis 1:28-29 / 2:16-17 (ESV)

God gave them every imaginable blessing... and only one totally insignificant restriction. Yet, that one restriction became unbearable to them because, as the serpent put it, if you eliminate that one restriction, “**YOU shall be as God.**” It was not eating the fruit that made Adam and Eve detestable to God but their rejection of Him as Lord of their lives.

The other example is when Israel was in the wilderness and were only 11 days from entering the Promised Land. God had miraculously fed them with manna for over three years but now, when they were so close to entering their inheritance, they began to complain,

<sup>4</sup> Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup> We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. <sup>6</sup> But now our strength is dried up, and **there is nothing at all but this manna to look at...**” <sup>10</sup> **And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly...** Numbers 11:4-6, 10 (ESV)

Many people say that the designation of foods as ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ was purely arbitrary. Such thinking denies the wisdom and goodness of God and, like the screaming two-year-old, says that we know better than He does. When we reject what He has provided for us and demand to have what we think is better, we display a deep ingratitude to Him. This attitude of ingratitude is a stench in His nostrils that makes us detestable to Him.

### **A Law Without Penalties?**

The dietary laws are strange because there seems to not be a penalty for violating them. One would expect, given the many chapters devoted to the subject, that the penalties would be severe and yet they don’t seem to be. Being unclean temporarily prevented you from participating in worship at the Tabernacle but other than there wasn’t an obvious consequence. The penalty was (and is) that living an unclean life makes us detestable before God. But do we care? The church today says that these scriptures no longer apply since God loves you no matter what and grace covers everything. Well, yes, God does love you no matter what and grace does cover everything but... there are consequences.



I love my dog, Duffy, no matter what. He is an adorable sweetheart. But when he insists on chasing skunks and gets sprayed, our fellowship is seriously impacted! We will have to go through a process that he hates before we can enjoy one another again.



But... what if someone really doesn't care what pleases or displeases the One that they call their Lord and Savior? They should not kid themselves that they are "His." When we give lip service to Him but we don't care to have a real relationship with Him, even the sacrifices we offer to Him becomes offensive.

*<sup>10</sup> Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain! **I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.** <sup>11</sup> For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup> But you profane it...*

Malachi 1:10-12 (ESV)

### ***So, what is the conclusion of the matter?***

Virtually everyone who calls themselves Christians regularly eat what God called "unclean" in the Old Testament. They justify this by pointing to a number of New Testament verses that "prove" that God changed His laws in the New Testament. However, by examining these verses in context, we disproved these proofs. We also observed that God says that living unclean makes you detestable to Him and that Jesus said the unclean and detestable will not enter His city, the New Jerusalem.

But do we care?

It is true that God's grace covers a multitude of sins. If that were not true, I would have absolutely no hope of salvation. Yet, for me, if there was even a slight possibility that something in my life was displeasing to my Lord and Savior, I would do everything within my power to get rid of it. This is not because I am afraid of "losing my salvation" but because I want my life to bring Him pleasure and to honor Him before others.

### *They Will Notice*

If you do decide to “eat clean” people will notice. Unbelievers will let you know how dumb you are for giving up such good food. Church people will tell you that you are “under a curse” and that you have “fallen from grace.” They will notice!

But think of the impact it will have when you just smile and tell your unbelieving friends, ***“Yeah... I used to love that kind of food but I love Jesus a thousand times more. If He says I shouldn’t eat it, it’s off my menu!”*** They will be stunned when they see someone actually making Him the Lord of their lives.

And when your church friends tell you that obeying God’s law is a sin, you can just gently smile and say, ***“Nope... I’m not relying on any law to gain favor with God, He loves me so much that I just want to please Him in everything that I do.”*** They will likewise be stunned when they see someone who walks in a genuine love relationship with the Almighty.

***“You are the sons of the LORD your God...  
you are a people holy to the LORD your God,  
and the LORD has chosen you to be a people  
for His treasured possession,  
out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.***

Deuteronomy 14:1-2 (ESV)

This is our heritage.

Shalom!