

Clean and Unclean

Many consider the writings in the Bible to be outdated. However, Scripture has much to say about what God intended us to eat. God has a perfect plan for humans, and it started at the very beginning of time.

Jesus Himself created this planet to be inhabited and enjoyed by humankind. He wants us to be happy and healthy.

The Original Human Diet

In the beginning, God created everything perfect. There were no weeds and no blights.

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so (Genesis 1:11 NIV).

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Genesis 1:26).

After God created the perfect world, he gave Adam and Eve instructions about their diet. He said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it" (Genesis 1:29). This includes nuts, grains, legumes, and seeds.

Our human digestive system is geared toward the diet God set out for us in Genesis 1. The length of the digestive tract is a strong indicator of what type of food is normally eaten, and our digestive tract is 12-14 times our shoulder-to-hip trunk length, the same as fruit-eating animals.

Herbivores, such as cattle, have a gut-length 20 times their body length, since it takes longer to digest the fiber content in their diet. The shortest tracts are found in meat-eaters. It does not take many thousands of years for a change to take place in gut lengths due to changes of diet. Recent studies have shown that this can take place over a short period of time.

Vegetables Enter The Human Diet

After the Fall, humans were also permitted to eat vegetables. This may have been because the original foods were not as available as they were before. Satan's work is to destroy or deface God's creation whenever he can. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, Satan stole their dominion of the planet, and the whole of creation has been groaning ever since. God told Adam that the earth would be cursed—that it would produce thorns and thistles—and that he "will eat the plants of the field" (Genesis 3:18 NIV).

Vegetables are very rich in elemental sulfur and are good cleansers of the digestive tract. Vegetables also take longer to digest than the fruits, grains, and seeds that God originally gave humans to eat. It has been proven that if one eats vegetables with any of the original foods at the same meal, fermentation takes place in the gut. This is not a healthy practice (See Food Combining). This fermentation consists largely of fatty acids that have a detrimental effect on the body's immune system. Try to avoid eating vegetables and fruits at the same meal.

Fruits can be eaten with grains, seeds, and nuts; and vegetables can be eaten with grains, seeds, and nuts. Fruit is digested quickest, followed by grains, then seeds and then nuts. Vegetables take longer to digest than all these (See Food Combining Chart).

Even today, everything our body requires is found in a grain kernel. It has the carbohydrate, the protein, and the essential lipids we need in all the correct proportions. However, we separate these good foods—and sell each portion at a much higher cost! Most bread these days lacks the basic natural ingredients. Much of the whole food that is still available is chemically treated. Nevertheless, if we all ate more whole grains we would have far fewer diseases.

Meat Enters The Human Diet

Meat entered our diet after the Flood. After the floodwaters had receded, the earth had little vegetation. Perhaps Noah had seeds with him and planted these for this first food. However, there would have been no fruit or nuts for a number of years. So, the Lord said, "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (Genesis 9:3 NIV).

In Genesis 7:2 there is reference to clean and unclean animals going into the ark. Thus, the concept of clean and unclean is not a Jewish concept and has no ceremonial connotations, but came from the time before the Flood.

If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD who heals you (Exodus 15:26 NIV).

God Defines Clean and Unclean

God gave the Israelites guidelines for what they should eat. Here is an overview of the clean and unclean animals that are discussed in the book of Leviticus.

Clean Animals

God specified that His people were to eat only clean animals. There were two main types of clean animals, as follows:

Hooved Animals

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, saying unto them, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that shall ye eat (Leviticus 11:1-3).

According to Leviticus 11, all clean animals are cud-chewers—cows, goats, deer, and other game. They all have a pre-stomach, or rumen, in which the food is pre-digested. The bacteria in the rumen are able to convert all the material into digestible matter. Only after this food has been thoroughly digested does it enter the real stomach.

Also, clean animals are all herbivores. They are, therefore, eaters of "primary" material.

Fowl

Birds that have a crop are also clean, since their food is well digested and does not ferment.

The chicken is listed as clean since it originally ate only seeds. Today, however, the average commercially reared chicken is fed on fishmeal or carcass meal (reject material from the abattoir), and can no longer be regarded as acceptable.

Marine Animals

These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat (Leviticus 11:9).

Only fish with fins and scales are edible. These fish are generally found in deep or fast-running waters, and are mainly algal eaters. They also have an excellent detoxifying enzyme system.

Insects

Leviticus 11 makes it clear that of all insects, only the locust and flying grasshopper are for eating.

Unclean Animals

God told the Israelites which animals they were not to eat. Without exception, all animals that consume "secondary material"—in other words, animals that eat animals—are unclean. These include the following:

Carnivorous Birds

All birds that eat other animals and do not have a crop are considered unclean.

Camels

The camel has no split or cloven hoof, making it unclean. However, this animal has a similar digestive system to the clean animals; so what is the problem? The camel

had to adapt to a desert environment in order to survive. It underwent a physiological adaptation where instead of sweating and losing its body water, the camel's body temperature rises to higher levels than before. This, unfortunately, allows the level of toxins in its body to rise to very high levels as well. This coping mechanism makes the camel unfit for human consumption.

Coneys

The coney, or dassie, is unclean. It is herbivorous, but has a poor thermo-regulator. Its body temperature does not remain constant throughout the changes in the weather during the year, and this causes its enzymes to be unstable, resulting in intestinal fermentation. This means that the coney's meat is very acidic.

Rabbits

Even though the rabbit is herbivorous, Leviticus 11:6 states that it is unclean. The rabbit has a very enlarged caecum. In order for the rabbit to obtain sufficient nutrients from the plants it eats, it has to ferment the material. This requires a fermentation chamber with an alkaline environment. Since the rabbit does not have a pre-stomach, like the cow does, it has to use its enlarged caecum.

However, its caecum is sandwiched between its gut and rectum and most of the absorption of the nutrients takes place there. When the rabbit redigests this material, it becomes coprophagous. In other words, it eats its own excrement. Consequently, the level of toxins in its tissues is far higher than in other herbivores. Bile salts, fatty acids, gases, and ammonia levels are all at unacceptable levels for human consumption. All rodents, and even the horse, fall into the same category.

Swine

In most modern farms, pigs are fed the worst of foods. On the biggest farms, the largest pigs are fed rotten eggs and chickens that died from disease.

Sometimes, pigs are kept in batteries where only a few pigs get the food. The rest of the pigs get only the droppings, which are extremely toxic. Any tissue from these animals makes them very unclean indeed.

Pigs have very high histamine levels. The connective tissue is very rich in sulfur, leading to acidosis and osteoporosis because of the loss of calcium along with the sulfates. Research indicates that high sulfate levels, especially in meat-rich diets, are responsible for osteoporosis.

Research has found that at the time when pigs leave the farms, 56% of all pork samples are contaminated with salmonella. When "clean" animals leave the farms, only 15% of the meat is contaminated. When the pig meat leaves the abattoir, 80% is contaminated, and when it reaches the butcher, the level of contamination is virtually 100%. The "clean" animals have only a 40% contamination level by this stage.

The pig is certainly responsible for much disease. Many people are allergic to pork because of the high histamine levels, and pork also encourages the formation of excessive amounts of mucous in our bodies.

God warns us in Leviticus 11:26 to not even touch the carcass of a pig. It has high levels of contamination of bacteria such as campylobacta and salmonella.

Fish

And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you (Leviticus 11:10).

Those fish that do not have fins and scales are either scavengers or pure carnivores, and are unclean.

The common snoek has scales, but as it is taken out of the water the scales fall off, so they cannot be classified as clean. Each snoek is also home to thousands of bladder worms, which are full of urea. This urea is what gives that the snoek its distinctive tangy flavor that many people enjoy.

Insects

Insects that do not fly, or are further down on the food chain than the locust or grasshopper, are not for eating.

Mammals and Reptiles

According to Leviticus 11:27, "Whatsoever goes upon his paws," such as cats, dogs, rats, mice, and weasels, are unclean. All reptiles are also unclean.

God is concerned with the health of all His creatures: human and animal. In the next article, we will discuss the importance of these Old Testament teachings in our lives today. We will also discover what the New Testament says about how we should eat.

Do The Old Testament Dietary Laws Still Apply?

We have examined the original diet God intended for humankind, and the animals that God defined as clean and unclean after sin entered the world. Now we ask, why should we follow the Old Testament dietary laws in this day and age?

We will work through several reasons people object, and various Bible verses that seem to say we don't have to observe the dietary laws: We must learn to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Question 1: Aren't these lists of clean and unclean animals just for the Jews?

Answer: Although the lists are recorded in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, the first mention is in the time of the Flood (Genesis 7:1-3). There were no Jews were on Noah's Ark. Only later, the descendents of Abraham become known as "Jews."ⁱ So in the early days, God instructed them in the concept of "clean" and "unclean" animals.

The list predates the laws of Moses, therefore applying to all humanity, not just one particular group.

Question 2: Didn't Peter have a vision that told him to eat unclean animals? Wouldn't this mean that the dietary laws were no longer in effect?

Answer: Note the following facts about the Acts 10 story:

A) Cornelius, a Gentile, received a vision instructing him to send for Peter.

B) Peter also received a vision before Cornelius's men came to his home. He "saw heaven opened" and a sheet descending "down to the earth."ⁱⁱ It was filled with unclean animals, creeping things, and fowls (Acts 10:11-12).

C) When Peter is told to "kill, and eat" he says, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14). Peter was never taught by Jesus to eat anything "common or unclean." He can't believe the Lord would tell him to do this.

D) "Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean" (Acts 10:17). If the Lord literally told him to eat unclean animals, why would he doubt? Wouldn't the change in dietary laws be obvious? Peter doubted because he realized the vision was symbolic—not referring to literal unclean animals.

E) When Peter came to Cornelius' home, he realized, "God hath shewed me that I should not call any **man** common or unclean" (Acts 10:28, emphasis added). The Holy Spirit was given to Gentiles just as He had been given to the Jews on Pentecost. Peter learned that the Gospel message was meant for all the world, not just the Jews. The vision was not about dietary laws, but about giving the message to all—because no one to be considered "unclean," or unreachable by Christ's redemption. The vision used unclean creatures as symbols of Gentile nations now called to come to God through the Gospel.ⁱⁱⁱ

Question 3: Haven't we been called to liberty in Christ, no longer under the slavery of the Law?

Answer: Since the dietary laws existed before Noah's time, is obedience to them really enslavement?

Jesus told us that He came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17). Good health and long life is anything but slavery.

Think of the history of these dietary laws: First, they are given to humankind before the days of Noah. Then, the Lord tells His people in the Exodus they will be disease-free if they follow His laws (Exodus 15:26). The clean and unclean foods are clearly defined in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Peter's vision shows Jesus did not abolish "clean and unclean" (Acts 10).

Paul tells believers to "touch not the unclean thing" and the Lord will receive them (2 Corinthians 6:17). John speaks of Spiritual Babylon as a "cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation 18:2). In Isaiah's prophesy of the new earth after the

return of Christ, those who eat “swine’s flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together” (Isaiah 66:17). From one end of the Bible to the other, the concept of “clean and unclean” is upheld. It is a matter of health and well-being, not slavery.

Our modern world equates “freedom” with doing whatever we wish, but God calls us to a higher standard. Paul tells us to “use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). Jesus tells us “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Peter tells us “the Spirit of Christ” was in the prophets of old (1 Peter 1:10-11), meaning that the dietary laws are the words of Christ.

Question 4: Romans 14:14 says, “there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” Was Paul saying that nothing is unclean?

Answer: Compare Romans 14 with 1 Corinthians 8-10. You will see that the same problem is being addressed—friction between two parties in the early Church.^{iv}

Jewish converts (aware of dietary laws) didn’t mind eating clean animals sold in the heathen markets. The Gentile converts thought heathen idols made sacrificed meat unclean:

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 (1 Corinthians 8:4).

The argument wasn’t about dietary laws, but meat sacrificed to heathen idols. Paul urged Jewish and Gentile believers not to condemn each other based on sacrificed meat. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 8:10-11:

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; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for which Christ died?

In other words, don’t make a brother feel he should ignore his uneasiness and try to eat sacrificed meat anyway. He would feel he is lost because his conscience wouldn’t let him rest.

But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:15-17).

Paul is not dealing with a moral law here. He is calling for understanding of the tender consciences of weaker brothers.^v He advises, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Romans 14:13).

Question 5: In Matthew 15:11 Jesus says, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” Does this mean we can eat whatever we want and nothing bad will happen?

Answer: There are consequences to everything we eat—good and bad. Eating poorly will of course harm our bodies, just as eating well will help our bodies maintain health.

This verse needs to be understood in its proper context. Certainly it doesn't mean that anything we eat is now good for us regardless of what it is, for we all know that there are many things that can go “into the mouth” and produce dire consequences. Many foods and drugs available today are harmful to our health. They are not made safe to eat because of this verse. In Matthew 15:2, the Pharisees criticize Jesus, saying, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” The Pharisees were not really concerned with physical cleanliness. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to obey their washing ritual so any heathen “defilement” would be magically removed.

In verse 15, Peter asks Jesus to explain the parable. He realized there was deeper meaning than just ritual washing. Jesus explains it this way:

Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man (Matthew 15:17-20).

This passage is not concerned with dietary laws, but rather the fruitlessness of ritual washing while the dark heart remains untouched.

Question 6: Doesn't 1 Timothy 4:3-4 tell us that we can eat anything if we pray over it first?

Answer: Let's observe what the verses actually say:

A) Paul is telling Timothy about false believers who will “depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1). They are in error—no longer following the Scriptures.

B) Paul tells Timothy these false teachers will command people to “abstain from meats.” But what kind of meats? 1 Timothy 4:3 tells us these are not unclean meats but meats that “God hath created to be received with thanksgiving.” This cannot mean unclean animals, because they were never intended to be eaten!

C) These clean meats are to be “received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:3). Believe and know the truth about what? Obviously, the truth about clean and unclean animals.

D) 1 Timothy 4:4 says, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.” This does not mean that every created being is

permitted to be eaten. If this were the meaning, cannibalism would be justified. Rather, this verse refers to the previous verse's clean animals. Those who "believe and know the truth" will receive "with thanksgiving."

E) 1 Timothy 5:5 describes the meat further: "For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Two things sanctify this food—"the word of God" and "prayer." Remember this is the meat that false teachers said could not be eaten. This is in contradiction to God's Word which listed the meat as "clean" (1 Timothy 5:1). By knowing the truth in the Word of God, and receiving these clean animals in a thankful manner with prayer, the true believers would obey God and not the "doctrines of devils."

What would this passage be saying if it referred to unclean instead of clean food? Would it really mean that we could eat anything if we pray over it? Would we allow our children to eat anything, as long as they prayed over it? Not likely! We can expect God, our Father, to give guidance of what is good for us.

Conclusion

For the sake of showing our love to the Lord by obeying Him, as well as escaping disease by observing His dietary laws—let us honor God by following His rules for health and happiness.^{vi} Do we really want to ignore these health laws? If we do, we do so to our own peril.

Notes:

i The term "Jews" is used for the first time in the Bible in 2 Kings 16: 6. Abraham was known as "the Hebrew" (Genesis 14:13)

ii The vision comes from heaven one would expect such creatures to rise out of the earth, not descend from heaven! This indicates this was symbolic, not literal.

iii Even today we use unclean animals as symbols of nations, such as the American Eagle, the British Lion, the Canadian Beaver, and the Russian Bear.

iv Consider the following verses: 1 Corinthians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; and 1 Corinthians 10:31.

v Bear in mind that when Paul says "nothing is unclean of itself," he is saying that we can't always tell just by our own judgment what is clean and unclean. It is determined by the Word of God. If a person feels that something is unclean, then the safe thing to do is avoid eating it since he does not have the faith to eat without scruples. Only knowledge of God's Word can let our conscience rest in the fact that a particular food is clean or unclean..

vi Romans 14 speaks about esteeming "one day above another" as well as eating (or not eating) sacrificed foods. Both problems focused on observing festivals and sacrifices. Paul did not want new believers swept back into dead rituals because some "knowledgeable" person encouraged weaker brothers to view them as "harmless." Paul wanted believers to pay special attention to problems with the weaker brother's conscience. Paul was not telling

believers to ignore either the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments, or the dietary laws laid down by the Creator since the days of Noah.