

# Are Gentiles Required to Obey the Dietary Laws

By Rabbi David Hall

One of the most frequent questions we get from our site visitors is how much of the Torah are gentiles required to follow. My response is, “Only the parts you want to receive the blessings for obeying.” See Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

Here are some scriptures that people claim proves the gentiles do not have to follow the Torah. This is not a complete list but these are the most frequently quoted.

- [1 Timothy 4:1-6](#)
- [Mark 7:14-23](#)
- [Acts 15 and 21](#)
- [Acts 10](#)

Focal verse: 1 Timothy 4:1-6

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

To prove that gentiles do not have to follow the written Torah some use this verse. This stance is from ignorant and unlearned persons. We should take a closer look at verse 4 in context.

<sup>1</sup>Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup>speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup>for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

<sup>6</sup>If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

When thinking on this verse outside of the context, it follows that Paul taught Timothy that it is okay for gentile believers to eat the flesh of swine etc. Notice the absence of any such example in the entire book of 1 Timothy.

Context: It is important to read every reference in Scripture contextually. In this section it is easy to see the context because it is set so close to the verse in question. However, gentiles want so much to “have their pigs and eat them too” that this verse “jumps off the page” into their eyes. It causes them not to even see the surrounding verses. Their

excitement grows as they salivate over that nice ham they are about to use to celebrate the birth of their Messiah on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

The central point of this discourse is found in the preceding verse, "...to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." And it is substantiated in the verse immediately following, "for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Where in the "Word of G-d" are we told that anyone may eat the flesh of swine? Keep in mind that the "New Covenant writings" did not exist as authorized cannon or Sacred Scripture at the time Shaul wrote this letter to Timothy. His reference to "the word of G-d" is pointing to the Tanakh (Old Covenant Scripture). There is no reference anywhere in the Bible that clearly says it is okay for followers of YHWH to eat the flesh of swine. There are some New Covenant writings that seem to say it is okay at first glimpse to a gentile mindset but upon closer examination these are not saying anything about eating of the flesh of biblically unclean creatures.

Next let's look at the word "food" above. It comes from the Greek word *bromah*, which is only used of things allowed or prohibited in the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), see Strong's Exhaustive Concordance Greek dictionary for confirmation. So Shaul is not teaching Timothy that it is okay for anyone to eat something prohibited in "G-d's Word". To do so would have been absurd.

Mark 7:14-23

<sup>14</sup>When He had called all the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear! <sup>17</sup>When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. <sup>18</sup>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, <sup>19</sup>because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" <sup>20</sup>And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. <sup>21</sup>For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, <sup>22</sup>thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Here again the underlined text is what the gentile mindset focuses on for self-justification in satisfying the appetite for the unclean creatures of the earth and proving that they do not have to follow Torah law. To get the context of this section we have to reach back a little further to verse 5 of the chapter.

<sup>5</sup>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?"

As you can see, the discussion wasn't about animal flesh at all. It was about "bread" which had become defiled by touching it without the ceremonial washing of the hands.

Now let's look at the context a little closer to the point of interest. Verse 19:

thus purifying all foods

The word "foods" is again the Greek word *bromah* which as stated above speaks of things permitted or denied by the Torah. Even without the evidence of the Greek word we can logically analyze this by context. He was speaking to about and for our Jewish people. Did they consider things disallowed by Torah to be "food"? Of course not! Therefore we can conclude by a simple contextual study of who is in this discussion (no gentiles) that he is not talking about the flesh of swine or other illegal creatures.

Next we look at His statement found in verses 18 and 19:

Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him,  
<sup>19</sup>because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated...

Does eating bread with unwashed hands enter the heart? NO! How about eating kosher beef? Of course not! What about pig? Does it break a commandment of HaShem? Yes! Does this go into the heart? It does mine. Following the rest of his examples laid out in the following verses shows that He is speaking of breaking the commandments of HaShem:

<sup>20</sup>And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. <sup>21</sup>For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, <sup>22</sup>thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup>All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Therefore we conclude that the written Torah is not being questioned here. It is the traditions of man that were added to the biblical mandates that are being questioned.

Some then reply, "But look at Acts 15 and 21!"

Acts 15 is about circumcision... This is why Shaul went to Jerusalem to meet with the other emissaries on this matter. Together they discussed the scriptures and what was intended for gentiles to enter into covenant relationship with our Jewish people. They did not say that a person coming into the faith without circumcision could not be circumcised else Shaul (Paul) erred in the very next chapter in circumcising Timothy. There is a list of things the gentiles were to be taught. This is not the sum total of the teaching to be given to the gentiles. It is only a starting point. Otherwise, why do we need the rest of the Bible?

Acts 21 is not focused on gentiles but rather on Jews and obedience to Torah. They said in passing that gentiles were not required to be circumcised etc. in the counsel at Jerusalem. So Acts 21 is repeating the decision recorded in Acts 15 regarding the gentiles.

Then some throw in Acts 10 and 11. Didn't G-d tell Peter that it is okay to eat any creature we want?

The answer is a resounding NO! Peter tells us what the interpretation of the dream is in verse 28:

<sup>28</sup>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. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

Therefore we conclude that Peter himself told us the vision was not about eating food but rather about the cleansing of the gentiles.