

Romans 14:14, and 1Corinthians 8, and 10

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I know, and am persuaded in the Lord Yeshua, that nothing is unclean of itself; except that to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. - Romans 14:14

WHAT IS CONSIDERED FOOD?

Today we consider almost anything “food”; from candy bars to frozen microwave dinners; from popcorn to donuts. The closest we come to labeling a substance “unclean” is to call it “junk food”. But even junk food is still edible. Our twentieth century lifestyle is far removed from the life of a first century orthodox Jew. Paul, the writer of the book of Romans, was first century Hebrew, a Pharisee, and a rabbi schooled very extensively in the Scriptures. To Paul, when words like “clean”, “pure”, or “legal” were spoken in relationship to food, the supreme authority on such dietary matters was always the Word of God—the Holy Scriptures. To the apostle Paul, food only referred to those items outlined by God in His word!

Since the Word of God calls shrimp, lobster, crab, pork, rabbit, and other creatures listed in Deuteronomy 14 and Leviticus 11 unclean or not edible, these would not be considered as food to Paul. To anyone who obeyed God’s word, the “SHALT NOT” list of animals, fish, birds, and creeping things was considered detestable, abominable, unhealthy, impure and unclean to touch. much less to eat. Since it is clear in Scripture that God calls certain creatures unclean, what did Paul mean when he said in Romans 14:14 that there is nothing unclean of itself? To rightly divide and understand Paul’s comments, it would be helpful to look at 1Corinthians chapters 8 and 10 since the same issue of foods offered to idols is addressed, and then we will rap it up back in Romans 14.

1Corinthians chapters 8 and 10

The eating of “unclean” things is forbidden in God’s Word. Unclean things are not edible! Therefore, when Paul uses the words, “the eating of things offered to idols,” he is referring to “clean” foods. What about “clean foods” offered to idols? Should believers eat clean foods offered to idols? (The scriptures in Acts 15, and similar scriptures in Revelation are concerned with idol worship, temple prostitution/ sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from drinking blood sacrifices. Direct idol worship was the prohibition being stressed) Paul addresses this problem when he wrote:

1Corinthians 8:4-6

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For though there are things that are called "gods," whether in the heavens or on earth; as there are many "gods" and many "lords;" yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for him; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, through whom are all things, and we live through him.

Paul is confirming in 1Corinthians 8:4-6 that we should have no other gods before the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because He is supreme; the Creator of all things and giver of life. All other gods are nothing in comparison with the one true God. Paul continues:

1Corinthians 8:7

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as things offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Paul realizes that there are brothers and sisters who don't understand the awesomeness of God and give power to these pagan gods, fearing the demons associated with the idols. These "weaker" brothers, as Paul refers to them, refuse these clean foods offered to the idols because of the fear of being "defiled" by them.

The knowledge of the authority and supremacy of God over demons was not yet fully comprehended by some in the early church. Paul is stating a phenomena true of some in the church today. Some people fears Satan's power more than the power and authority of Yeshua (Jesus) to overcome any power Satan or his demons may "try" to exercise over them. Paul continues by emphasizing that eating food offered to idols in the presence of a "weaker" brother might cause him to stumble or even fall away from the faith:

1Corinthians 8:11

And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"

Paul concludes 1Corinthians chapter 8 by stating that he is willing to stop eating clean meat, even if the Word of God permits it, in order that a brother may not stumble or fall because of his actions.

1Corinthians 8:13

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

Paul is referring to clean meat in this passage since unclean meat is never considered by a Jew like Paul to be “food”. Refusing to eat clean meat in order to keep a brother from “stumbling” is not going against the Word of God. However, eating unclean foods in order to keep a brother from stumbling would be contrary to the Scriptures.

Paul continues the them of foods (clean of course) offered to idols in chapter 10 of 1Corinthians:

1Corinthians 10:19

What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols anything?

Paul again emphasizes that God is supreme and that food offered to idols has no real authority over the name of Yeshua (Jesus). If a believer eats these clean foods offered to idols, they have not broken God’s commands. This next statement by Paul has been misinterpreted for almost two thousand years and has given license for many to unknowingly violate the Word of God:

1Corinthians 10:23

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful; all things are lawful for me; but all things do not edify.

Is Paul giving us permission to murder, commit adultery, lie, steal, and eat unclean things? God forbid! When Paul says the word “lawful”, he means those things allowed by God in His word. The Word of God prohibits idolatry, adultery, stealing, eating unclean things, as well as many other things. These actions are “unlawful” or forbidden. Paul is explaining that even though he is not forbidden to eat clean things offered to idols in God’s word, he can still cause a brother to fall away by eating these things and this does not edify his brother. In 1Corinthians 6:12 Paul repeats these very words that “all things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful” and continues in the next verse to emphasize the important point that our bodies belong to God. He also wants us to remember, as Yeshua (Jesus) explains in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 that both food and our bodies will pass away;

1Corinthians 6:13

Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

Paul emphasizes that our body is for the Lord and the Lord is for our body. The Lord desires for us to do what is lawful for our body. The Lord desires for us to do what is lawful for our body, that is to be obedient to His word. His word covers every aspect of a

holy life, including eating healthy foods. God's Word is always for our well being, but we should also consider the well being of others:

1Corinthians 10:24

Let no one seek his own, but each other's well being.

These next two passages of Scripture have been quoted, out of their context, to encourage people to eat whatever is placed before you. But Paul, keeper of God's Word, is saying throughout these passages that the Word does not prohibit us from eating clean meats offered to idols, but we should eat them without making an issue out of whether this or that clean meat has been offered to an idol:

1Corinthians 10:25

Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions....

We must remember that a Jew, like Paul, when entering a Gentile meat market would pass right by the shrimp, lobster, and pork. Paul is suggesting that when a believer finds himself in a heathen or Gentile meat market, such as in Rome of Corinth (where idols were worshipped), he should not inquire of the butcher or salesperson whether the clean meat was offered to idols. Just buy and enjoy. He gives the same advice to a believer invited to an unbeliever's home for dinner:

1Corinthians 10:27

If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions.....

The phrase, "eat whatever is set before you", would include only the edible or clean foods outlined in the Scriptures. Paul is telling us not to be concerned whether these "edible" foods were offered to strange gods.

Back to romans 14

Now we can understand Romans 14 in its proper context – According to Paul, the foods that God has declared clean cannot be made unclean when offered to idols. But, "to him it is unclean". (Romans 14:14) One person believes he can eat all (clean) meats offered to idols and another, afraid of defilement by the idol, refuses to eat meat and eats only vegetables. The scriptures in ACTS 15, and similar scriptures in Revelation are centered around direct idol worship of the individual, not the believer that is securely founded in Messiah. (Other than these references) The scriptures are silent about whether we are allowed to eat meats that were possibly offered to idols beforehand; therefore, Paul urges us not to argue over "doubtful things".

Romans 14:1-3

Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Paul is convinced by Yeshua (Jesus) Himself that whatever God has declared in His word to be clean to eat, is clean, and no idol can make it unclean. To believe that an idol can defile what God has declared to be clean would be giving more authority to the idol than to God. Yet, for those who believe that strange gods can defile what God has declared clean, Paul suggests they should not eat such things:

Romans 14:14

I know and am convinced by the Lord Yeshua (Jesus) that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Paul reaffirms what he said in 1Corinthians 10 about abstaining from clean or pure meats offered to idols if it would cause a brother to be offended and to stumble:

Romans 14:20-21 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not of faith is in.

If the eating of clean meats offered to idols was contrary to the Word of God, Paul would have rebuked those in error. [Obviously direct participating in idol worship and participating in meat offered to idols is wrong. But, in the time in which Paul lived much of these meats were sold in markets afterward for people to buy, and that is what the argument was about...whether this meat was fit for consumption]. But God's word is silent on this matter (The scriptures in Acts 15, and similar scriptures in Revelation are concerned with idol worship, temple prostitution/ sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from drinking blood sacrifices. Direct idol worship was the prohibition being stressed) and so Paul admonishes us, "not to dispute over doubtful things"(Romans 14:1). Shall we in the Church dispute over doubtful points of doctrine upon which the Scriptures are either silent, or vague? Let us instead restore to the Church God's dietary principles upon which the Scriptures are neither vague or silent!