

New Testament passages which some modern Christians use to justify

Eating Unclean Meat

I know seven passages that some modern Christians cite to justify their claim that God changed his mind on what a follower of Christ should or should not take into his body, a body that serves as God's Temple, where He desires to reside, namely unclean meat. I address each of the seven here and offer some additional passages that support the continued prohibitions of eating unclean meat.

If you know of any other passages, please share them with me.

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In Acts chapter 15 those of the circumcision raise a question so important that a council was called at Jerusalem which concluded that new Christians did not need to observe anything but abstaining from eating meat offered to idols, from eating meat not bled correctly, from eating meats killed incorrectly and from "fornication." Nothing else was necessary for a new Christian.

So a Christian has to be concerned a lot about what he eats. And sex, but lying, stealing and murder aren't mentioned. Well maybe they are just assumed, even though illicit sex isn't assumed. It is stated. Murder, stealing and lying aren't stated. What about confessing Christ as Savior? That isn't stated either. Is this correct? That "no greater burden than these necessary things" are necessary? Three food items and illicit sex? Hmm maybe there is more to this chapter in its ancient context than what a modern reader sees on the surface.

Is "circumcised" used in Acts 15:1 the same as it is used in John 7:23 and Romans 2:28, meaning literal circumcision of the penis or as it is used as it is in Acts 10:45 11:2, Ephesians 2:11, Galatians 2:12 and Romans 4:11 where it means "they of the circumcision and their customs?"

This latter usage is the meaning in nearly every new testament occurrence. The issue that was raised by those concerned with "circumcision" in Acts 15 was so important that the counsel of Jerusalem was called. What was their conclusion? Did their conclusion even mention literal circumcision? Or even the word "circumcision?"

The matters cited in the conclusion of the chapter are three different food laws of Moses and "fornication." What does it mean then that we should "lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things?" "Circumcision" isn't even mentioned. Murder, stealing and lying aren't mentioned either. Confessing Jesus as Savior isn't mentioned as necessary. So what do these four things mean?

This might make sense if only one subject were in question. For instance if "fornication" had something to do with food, then it makes sense. These four things are the only things that are important ABOUT FOOD. But if three are about food and one is about sex, then the passage is not talking about just one thing. Sex and food are very very different things. The passage brings up diverse matters, yet fails to bring up murder, theft, etc.

What does it mean that murder, theft, lying are not mentioned? Does it mean that three of Moses' commandments about food, not offered to idol, killed correctly and draining the blood are important as well as avoiding improper sexual activity are the only things that we need be concerned with? Are the others, circumcision, murder and theft of less consequence than these?

Or might "lay no greater burden" be referring not to diverse subjects, (literal circumcision, food, sexual misconduct, murder, stealing, etc.) but instead to only one subject food? So that "no greater burden" refers to no greater burden regarding food? And food only. Not circumcision, murder, etc. If that were so, then the question brought by those of the circumcision were Jewish customs, "commandments of men," which were added to Moses food Laws, then "lay no greater burden" makes sense.

The Jewish customs added to Moses' food laws. Do not eat cheese with meat, etc. What if those of the circumcision were requiring new Christians to eat according to Jewish dietary customs instead of what Moses actually said about food. And the council of Jerusalem reminded new Christians that no burden greater than what Moses said about foods offered to idols, foods killed incorrectly, foods not drained of blood and unclean or fornicated meat was necessary?

Acts 15 is actually commanding Christians to keep all four of Moses' food Law. And reminds new Christians in v. 21 these Laws are taught in every city.

If that is not the case then we are left to interpret Acts 15 to mean: The question of literal circumcision was raised and the matter was so important that a council at Jerusalem was called. But the conclusion to the counsel didn't actually address circumcision at all but referred instead to three of Moses' four food laws and sex. And claimed these four things are the only things new Christians have to be concerned about.

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Matthew 15:11 "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. 17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught 18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. 19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:"

Mark 7: 18 "And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; 19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats 20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye,

blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.”

These are the words of the Christ. This is not an excuse to start eating unclean meat. It is instead an explanation of how unclean meat defiles us. It is not the meat that defiles us. It is the rebellion in our heart when we first decide to lift pig meat off the plate and into our mouth. We are defiled before it ever reaches our lips.

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Acts 10:9 ¶ “On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. 17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,”

Peter wasn't sure what this vision meant. v17. If the meaning were as obvious as some think, why didn't Peter understand it's meaning. Perhaps because Peter was very familiar with the Old Testament book of Ezekiel where very similar vision was given to Ezekiel 4:12-15.

As with Peter, Ezekiel did not eat and was not required to eat anything unclean even though the same instructions were given him. In the case of Ezekiel, God explained very plainly to Ezekiel that the instructions were about people not about meat. God was making His people unclean in Ezekiel. Where as in Peter, God was making His people clean again.

Peter explains this in the rest of Acts chapter 10 and makes it clear that his vision was indeed about making people clean, not food in Acts 11:1-18. It is in v.5 that Peter particularly describes the vision of the unclean meat as the subject of his understanding that these Gentiles could receive God again.

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1 Corinthians 10:27 “If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.”

Reading the whole chapter makes it clear this is not about unclean meat, but about meat offered to idols in the shambles. Starting in v.1 Paul tells us about Moses and that it was Christ who was with Moses then. Paul rehearses some of the laws which they broke. In v. 14 Paul begins to speak of the transgression of idolatry. v. 25 Paul makes a direct reference to foods purchased in the shambles. Much of which was offered to Greek and Roman idols then sold by the idolatrous temples in the shambles to raise money for the temple. v. 28

Paul makes it very clear that he is talking about food offered to idols, not unclean meat. Paul explains that if you are offered meat that might have been offered to idols, but the person bringing the meat doesn't care, don't worry, eat. But if he makes it clear that he selected meat because it was offered to idols, then refuse the meat to set a good example for him.

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Romans 14:14 ¶ "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. "

There is nothing in v. 14 that specifies Paul is talking about meat made unclean by offer to idols. But there is no reason to believe it was about the kind of meat either.

In v21 Paul compares eating "unclean" meat with drinking wine. Moses said nothing about unclean wine. The only way wine could be unclean is if it were offered to idols. Paul is talking about idolatry in Romans 14. Not the kind of meat.

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1 Timothy 4:1 ¶ "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. "

There is nothing in Moses' law about forbidding to marry. Moses' Law is not being questioned here. These are the commandments of men. Refer to Acts 15 where the Apostles reject the commandments of men for the four food laws of Moses.

There is nothing here that specifies going against Moses. In fact since the phrase "Every creature" is used, we know some limitations are implicit. Of course we can't eat all creatures. Some are poisonous. Pufferfish, for instance which is also unclean. If "every creature" doesn't actually mean every creature then it might very well include unclean animals.

The point being that this passage can in no way be an instruction to begin eating unclean meat. It is talking about diverse customs of men. Perhaps "abstain from meats" refers to vegetarianism. Or it refers to abstaining from eating anything purchased in the shambles as Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 10 because it might have been offered to an idol.

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1 Corinthians chapter 8 This whole short chapter makes it very clear that meat offered to idols is wrong as Moses told us. And that just like in 1 Corinthians 10 eating it in front of someone is a very bad example and a stumbling block.

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Colossians 2:11 ¶ "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: "

In v.16 meat and drink are compared. Moses said nothing of unclean drink. So Paul couldn't be listing things that were unclean before but are clean now. No drink is unclean except it is offered to an idol. And Paul isn't contradicting himself, saying that drinking that which is offered to idols is acceptable in Colossians 2 but not acceptable in 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14.

Those of the circumcision were not ignorant of the Law. None of them would have been contending some drink was unclean. v. 14 does not say that Christ's sacrifice blotted out the Law. It says the "ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us". What were those ordinances "Ye shall surely die". Christ's sacrifice did not blot out the Law, it blotted out the punishment against us.

In conclusion:

Once we are pardoned, we are told by Christ "Go and sin no more." "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "He who says he loves Christ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar." "Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning." 1 John 2:7

A very good additional article on the subject.

<https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-cleanand-unclean-meats/does-the-new-testament-abolish-meat-distinctions>

Find links at <http://jerrywickey.com/bible/commentary>

A download practical graphic of clean vs. unclean meat for use in the kitchen.

<https://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/what-does-the-bible-teach-about-clean-andunclean-meats/infographic-which>