

## Eating Pork

Someone asked me recently whether Believers in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) should follow the Biblical commandments against eating unclean foods, such as pork, shrimp, lobsters, etc. This person requested that I list the arguments commonly used to justify eating "pork and other scavengers," then respond to them.

**Point 1.** Many say that in Mark 7, Yeshua declared all foods clean. Therefore, they conclude that New Testament Believers (Christians) are free to eat anything they want without regard to Old Testament commandments.

Response: Mark 7 is not about eating animal flesh at all. It is about the ceremonial hand washing required by a manmade tradition called in Hebrew *n'tilat yadayim*.

“Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.” Mark 7:1-3, NKJV.

See, the disciples of Yeshua are eating bread, not animal flesh. But the Pharisees are upset because the disciples are not following the Pharisaic tradition of ceremonial hand washing before eating. Yeshua rebukes them for using manmade traditions as their doctrine.

“He answered and 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. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” Mark 7:6-7, NKJV.

When the disciples ate their bread without washing their hands, they might have eaten some dirt inadvertently. If so, the dirt would just go through the digestive system and out through natural bodily functions.

“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, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?” And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.” Mark 7:18-20, NKJV.

A little dirt on our food does not defile us. What defiles us is when we know that God prohibited something, but we decide in our hearts that we are going to do it anyway. For example, God specifically says pork is unclean.

“[A]nd the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, is unclean to you.” Leviticus 11:7, NKJV.

So, when we eat pork, we break God’s commandment. The Bible defines sin as breaking God’s commandments.

“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 3:4, NKJV.

Lawlessness, or “*Torah*-lessness,” is the breaking of God’s commandments. This is how the Bible defines sin.

Many people fail to realize that animals were clean or unclean from creation. They wrongly think that clean or unclean are merely designations in the “Law.” But remember that Noah took the animals on the ark a very, very long time before the children of Israel received the *Torah* at Mount Sinai. What do we learn from Genesis 7?

“Then the LORD said to Noah, “Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen *that you are* righteous before Me in this generation. You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that *are* unclean, a male and his female; also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth.” Genesis 7:1-3, NKJV.

So, the animals have always been clean or unclean. Noah took a pair of each unclean animal on the ark, as he would not eat from the unclean animals. Nor would he sacrifice to God from the unclean animals once the ark landed safely on Mount Ararat.

**Point 2.** Many say that God told Peter in Acts 10 that he is free to eat pork and all kinds of unclean things. After all, the Bible says –

“The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”” Acts 10:9-13, NKJV.

There were unclean animals on that “object like a great sheet.” The voice from heaven did say “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” But how does Peter respond? He does not eat from the unclean animals. Rather, notice his response.

“But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”” Acts 10:14, NKJV.

It had been many years since Messiah’s death, burial and resurrection. Yet, Peter had never eaten anything common or unclean. Clearly, he did not interpret Yeshua’s teachings in Mark 7 as permitting the eating of unclean animals, did he? No, he did not.

Unlike many Christian theologians, Peter did not interpret this vision as violation of God’s commandments either. Notice he interpreted the vision himself as follows.

“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 I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?”” Acts 10:28-29.

Remember Yeshua’s words in Mark 7:6-7 about “[t]eaching as doctrines the commandments of men”? Who gets to decide what is clean or unclean, God or man? God does. The vision in Acts 10 is about another manmade tradition. The Pharisees taught that Jews could not go to the home of a non-Jew (Gentile) because the Gentiles were unclean. In the vision, God instructs Peter that the Pharisees do not get to decide that the Gentiles are unclean. Were it not for this vision, Peter would not have gone to the home of Cornelius and the gospel would not have gone to the Gentiles as it did. The manmade tradition was contrary to the word of God that the gospel message was for all people, Jew and Gentile alike.

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.” Isaiah 55:1, NKJV.

Everyone means just that – Jew and non-Jew alike.

**Point 3.** Many say that in Romans 14, Paul said we can eat pigs if we want.

“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.” Romans 14:1-2, NKJV.

Notice first that the discussion is over “doubtful things.” Did Paul consider the commandments of God to be doubtful things? No. See for instance –

“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” Romans 3:31, NKJV.

Again –

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” Romans 6:1, NKJV.

And again –

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” Romans 6:15, NKJV.

Perhaps most importantly, if Paul meant that God’s commandment against eating unclean foods was to be ignored, he could not have said later, near the end of his life –

“And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: “Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans....” Acts 28:17, NKJV.

Was Paul lying to his brethren in Rome? No, he has been much misunderstood.

To Paul, the “doubtful things” are again the manmade traditions. Some of the Pharisees required their disciples to fast two days a week, Mondays and Thursdays. This was not a total fast like God required on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), but the disciples could not eat meat or drink wine. So, they ate only vegetables and drank water. Notice the debate is not between those eating pork and those eating only clean animals, such as cows. Instead, it is between those who eat clean meat, like beef or lamb, and those who eat only vegetables those two days per week.

For Biblical proof of the manmade tradition of fasting twice per week, look at Luke 18, which says –

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’” Luke 18:11-12.

Notice how he brags that he fasts twice per week. Such fasting was not commanded by God anywhere in the Bible. For more information, see the Pulpit Commentary below, which may be found online at <http://biblehub.com/luke/18-12.htm> --

“Verse 12 - I fast twice in the week. There was no such precept in the Law of Moses. There only a single fast-day in the year was enjoined, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29). By the time of Zechariah the prophet (Zechariah 8:19) the one fast-day had grown into four. But this fasting twice every week was a burthensome observance imposed in the later oral Law. Thursday and Monday were the appointed fasting-days, because tradition related how, on those days, Moses ascended and descended from Sinai. Compare the Talmud (treatise 'Bava Khama,' fol. 82. 1).”

Therefore, Romans 14 has nothing to do with eating unclean meats. It is a warning not to condemn others with less faith than you have. If they truly believe they must fast twice per week, how does that offend those who do not keep that tradition? Let God decide come Judgment Day whether He was pleased with these additional fast days.

Oh, lest I forget, later in Romans 14 it says –

“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.” Romans 14:14, NKJV.

At first glance, that appears to say that pigs are not unclean. But, it only appears that way because of some poor translation -- intentional or otherwise. The Greek word for unclean is *akathartos*. That is not the Greek word used in Romans 14:14 above. Rather, the Greek word is *koinos*, which means common. That means, Paul is instructing the Romans that something is permitted if God permits it in His Word, and it is prohibited if God prohibits it in His Word. The pig is unclean (*akathartos*) because God prohibited the eating of it in Leviticus 11. Clean meats, such as beef or lamb, are not prohibited by God, but if someone believes they must not eat the clean meats because of the manmade traditions they follow, then their tradition makes the clean meat common (*koinos*), meaning to be avoided by those who follow this tradition.

One more verse in Romans 14 causes confusion.

“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.” Romans 14:20, NKJV.

Paul uses the phrase “[a]ll things” in verse 20 just as he did in verse 2 to mean clean meats and vegetables as opposed to only vegetables. The clean meats, such as beef and lamb, are pure because they are permitted by God in the Scriptures.

**Point 4.** Another of the arguments in favor of eating unclean meats is found in Colossians.

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” Colossians 2:16-17, NKJV.

To many theologians, Paul clearly says we are to no longer observe Biblical commandments concerning foods, drinks, etc. But these verses are totally misunderstood.

The verses themselves do not say whether we should eschew judgment for **breaking** the commandments or for **keeping** them, do they? So, either Paul says we should break these commandments with impunity, or he is cautioning us to keep them. Which is it? We must carefully consider the context.

First, notice Paul says the commandments relating to foods, drinks, festivals (the feasts and festivals of Leviticus 23, which foreshadow the first and second comings of Messiah), new moons and Sabbaths have their substance in Yeshua the Messiah. That means that they have value in their ability to teach us about Messiah and His role in mankind’s salvation.

So, let’s look at the next two verses, which continue the teaching.

“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God.” Colossians 2:18-19, NKJV.

The emphasis in these two verses is on avoiding false humility and worship of angels. God’s commandments do not teach us to seek false humility and the worship of angels. In fact, these things are contrary to God’s commandments.

So, Paul is admonishing the Believers not to allow their former friends to talk them into giving up the commandments of God that teach about Messiah and go back to their old Gnostic religion that emphasized false humility and worship of angels. He said in essence – Do not go back to your old ways. How can we know for sure that this was Paul’s intent? Because in the same teaching Paul says –

“Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” Colossians 2:20-23, NKJV.

The “basic principles of the world” do not refer to God’s commandments, but to the unrighteous principles of Ascetic Gnosticism for which the Colossians were known. Notice Paul’s emphasis on “according to the commandments and doctrines *of men.*” (Emphasis added.) Paul is not warning against following God’s commandments. Just the opposite – he is warning the new Believers not to renounce God’s commandments to return to their old manmade traditions. Those old manmade traditions have an appearance of wisdom, and constitute self-imposed religion as opposed to God ordained religion, but ultimately have no value at all. Paul is not writing against God’s commandments, but in favor of them.

**Point 5.** Some point to 1 Corinthians 10 as proof that Believers can eat pork.

“Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake; for “the earth *is* the LORD’s, and all its fullness.” 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 question for conscience’ sake. But if anyone says to you, “This was offered to idols,” do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience’ sake; for “the earth *is* the LORD’s, and all its fullness.” “Conscience,” I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another *man’s* conscience? But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks?” 1 Corinthians 10:25-30, NKJV.

Here, the context has nothing to do with clean or unclean foods. The topic is food sacrificed to idols. If a nice beef steak is for sale in the marketplace, do we need to ask the vendor whether the butcher offered it to idols or not when he killed it? No, it is just a piece of beef.

If the meat in the marketplace had been pork, then no one in the Messianic Community of Paul’s day would have even considered it food. But notice the verses themselves clearly identify the context as food sacrificed to idols, not pork versus lamb – “if anyone says to you, “This was offered to idols....””

**Point 6.** The final point I have heard Christians advance for why we should eat pork is that there is not a single verse in the New Testament where it says not to eat unclean foods. But, that is not true.

Notice in 1 Corinthians 12:2, Paul tells us that he is writing to Believers who are not from a Jewish background, meaning they were Gentiles.

“You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.” 1 Corinthians 12:2, NKJV.

He admonishes them to do as he (Paul) does, since he does what Messiah Yeshua did.

“Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” 1 Corinthians 11:1, NKJV.

What else does he admonish these Gentile Believers (Christians) to do?

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”” 2 Corinthians 6:15-18, NKJV.

Notice that Paul said clearly – “Do not touch what is unclean.” Paul takes this Old Testament teaching which was written specifically to Israel and applies it to Gentile Believers in Messiah. Why? Just as God instructed Israel to avoid unclean foods because God was going to dwell with them in the midst of their camp, even so God in the Holy Spirit is going to dwell in the heart of each and every Believer. Would you ask God to dwell amongst uncleanness? Think about it.

So, even in the New Testament we are commanded not to eat – or even touch- the unclean things. You cannot eat pork without touching it.

**Point 7.** Let me now try to explain why I believe this is a very important topic for Believers in Messiah Yeshua.

In what is called the Sermon on the Mount, Yeshua said very clearly –

““Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:17-19, NKJV.

First, please understand that the sentence “I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” contains a Hebrew idiom. To destroy the Law means to misinterpret it. To fulfill the Law means to correctly interpret it. In essence, Yeshua was telling the disciples that they had been taught wrong by the Rabbis and other Jewish leaders. He was going to correct their understanding of Scripture.

He says quite clearly that “till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” *Ibid.*

The two phrases “till heaven and earth pass away” and “till all is fulfilled” mean the same thing. All prophecy is fulfilled when we reach the end of the Book of Revelation at the new heavens and the new earth.

Has heaven and earth passed away? No. If you question that, just stand up for a minute and jump up and down. The earth is still here, isn't it? Then, according to Yeshua, not the smallest letter (the jot is the Hebrew letter *yod* which looks like an apostrophe in the English) or the smallest piece of a letter (the tittle is a tiny pen stroke that distinguishes the Hebrew letter *daleth* from the *resh*) has passed away from the commandments of God in the *Torah* – what the New Testament refers to as the Law.

These are words of prophesy. If Yeshua said not the smallest letter or piece of a letter would pass away as long as heaven and earth are still here – and He did – then if whole commandments were annulled His prophesy failed. And that cannot be! If His prophesy failed then according to Deuteronomy 18, He would be a false prophet. God forbid!

Rather, it is as Peter told us –

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:14-16, NKJV.

Peter said it is easy to misunderstand Paul's writings.

How can I be sure that Paul has been misunderstood? I look at Bible prophecy, which cannot fail. Not only did Messiah tell us that not a jot or a tittle would pass from the Law until heaven and earth pass away – which by the way does not happen until the end of Revelation, where we read --

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” Revelation 21:1, NKJV.

But, notice Isaiah tells us –

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *That* the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” Isaiah 2:2-3, NKJV.

So, when Messiah returns at the end of the Great Tribulation (the Time of Jacob's Trouble as it is called in Jeremiah 30:7), He teaches *Torah* – the Law – from His throne in Zion, which is the prophetic name for Jerusalem when Messiah rules and reigns in the Messianic Kingdom.

Micah tells us the same thing in almost the exact same words –

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *That* the mountain of the LORD’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” Micah 4:1-2, NKJV.

But, are we as Believers in Messiah Yeshua not under the New Covenant? Yes, we are. But what does the New Covenant say?

“But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Jeremiah 31:33-34, NKJV.

Notice the Lord will put “My law,” the *Torah*, in the minds and hearts of those who believe in Him. What is “My law?” It is the commandments, statutes and judgments of God. Collectively, they are God’s instruction in righteousness for His children.

But how do I know the New Covenant includes the commandments against eating unclean foods, such as pork? Glad you asked. First, the Scripture tells us in detail what will be taught in the Messianic Kingdom with Yeshua ruling and reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords –

“And they shall teach My people *the difference* between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In controversy they shall stand as judges, *and* judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths.” Ezekiel 44:23-24, NKJV.

Notice it says, “to discern between the unclean and the clean.” That seems very clear to me. But, we can also read in the prophecies what will anger God when Yeshua returns at the end of the Tribulation –

“Who eat swine’s flesh, And the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels” Isaiah 65:4b, NKJV.

Also –

“For behold, the LORD will come with fire And with His chariots, like a whirlwind, To render His anger with fury, And His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword The LORD will judge all flesh; And the slain of the LORD shall be many. “Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, *To go* to the gardens After an *idol* in the midst, Eating swine’s flesh and the abomination and the mouse, Shall be consumed together,” says the LORD.” Isaiah 66:15-17, NKJV.

Do you want to be eating swine's flesh (pork) when Messiah returns? I do not. Those who do will be consumed, according to this Scripture.

Finally, notice how the Believers are described in the Book of Revelation.

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”  
Revelation 12:17, NKJV.

Again –

“Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12, NKJV.

In both references, the Saints (Believers) keep the commandments of God. But why should they?

Yeshua said –

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” John 14:15, NKJV.

Do you love Yeshua? Do you love God?

John further explained –

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” 1 John 5:2-3, NKJV.

This is in accordance with the Great Commission –

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20, NKJV.

How can you claim to observe all things Yeshua commanded us while eating a ham sandwich? You cannot. Remember Yeshua Himself taught –

“Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.” John 14:23-24, NKJV.

The words of Yeshua are the words of God. And, the Scripture says God does not change –

““For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” Malachi 3:6, NKJV.

God expects us to obey Him if we call ourselves His children –

““A son honors *his* father, And a servant *his* master. If then I am the Father, Where *is* My honor? And if I *am* a Master, Where *is* My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’” Malachi 1:6, NKJV.

These words remind me of what our Messiah Yeshua said in Luke –

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” Luke 6:46, NKJV.

Finally, hear the words of Yeshua in Revelation 22 –

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last.” Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.” Revelation 22:12-14, NKJV.

I would like to be blessed, wouldn't you?

So, why don't I eat pork? I love the Lord, so I keep His commandments – not for salvation, but because I am saved. Salvation is by faith, not by works, lest any man should boast, as we learn from Ephesians 2. But I demonstrate my faith and love by my obedience.

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