

# Scripture and Food

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There are two extremes with regard to the human body. One is neglect and abuse of the body. The other is an overemphasis on the body. Two examples may be enough: There are people who ruin their bodies and therefore themselves by the use of narcotic drugs and alcohol, while others pay excessive attention to their looks and feel they need one cosmetic surgery after the other. As stewards of the body that God has given us and that has been called “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19) we have to be careful not to fall into the trap of these extremes. We will now take a look at what the Bible has to say about the consumption of food.

## I. God’s Original Plan of Nutrition

Gen 1:29; 3:18 The diet of the first human beings consisted of grain, nuts, and fruit. This continued even after the Fall, when vegetables were added. These first human beings lived with a vegetarian diet. The Lord knows what is good for humanity.

## II. The Changed Plan

### 1. The Noahic Law

- Gen 9:3-4 Eating meat was permitted after the flood. Eating blood and carcasses (see “everything that lives and moves”) was forbidden.
- Gen 7:2-3 However, Noah already knew the distinction between clean and unclean animals.
- Gen 8:20 He only sacrificed clean animals. Obviously, it was not necessary to repeat the distinction between clean and unclean animals in Gen 9:3.
- Gen 1:29 The terms “every” and “all” in Gen 9:3 should not be understood in an all-encompassing sense. The “all” in Gen 1:29 would not include poisonous plants today.

Why did God allow for this change? Most likely due to the lack of vegetation after the Flood meat was allowed to be consumed. Possibly, a meat diet would reduce the lifespan of humans and prevent the worst consequences of evil (see Gen 6:5 and the long life spans mentioned in Gen 5)

Noah was not an Israelite but the father of all humans that are living today. Therefore, these regulations are given to all humanity and not just to Israel. Old Testament scholars acknowledge that the differentiation between clean and unclean animals goes further back than Moses (e.g., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983; I:144). Only clean animals were supposed to be eaten.

### 2. The Mosaic Law

The distinction between clean and unclean animals is found during the time of Moses again. A list of animals which may be eaten is found in Lev 11:

- Land animals: Animals that have split hoofs and chew the cud are clean and can be eaten. Animals walking on paws are unclean and should not be eaten (Lev 11:3, 27).
- Water animals: Animals that have fins and scales are clean (Lev 11:9).
- Flying animals: Some animals that are unclean are mentioned by name (Lev 11:13-19).
- Animals move around on the ground: They are unclean (Lev 11:29-30, 41).
- In addition, no carcass (Deut 14:21), no blood (Lev 17:10, 12, 14), and no animal fat (Lev 3:16-17) was to be eaten.

## III. The Validity of this Plan in NT Times

### 1. Jesus

Jesus observed the food laws of the OT (John 8:46). While he allowed demons to enter pigs which were consequently killed (Matt 8:28-34), he did not allow for the leftovers of the feeding of the multitude to be thrown away (John 6:1-13). Through his permission he may have indirectly confirmed the validity of the food laws.

## 2. The Apostles

The apostles observed God's commandments even after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Peter refused to eat the unclean animals seen in a vision (Acts 10:13-17). A little later he understood the vision. He should no longer consider gentiles unclean (Acts 10:28, 34-35).

## 3. Other Reasons for Observing Biblical Food Regulations

- Because the health laws are not part of the sacrificial system, they are not abolished with the sacrificial system.
- They are different from other laws on uncleanness, because typically uncleanness is acquired and can be done away with (e.g., Lev 12). However, unclean animals are intrinsically and innately unclean.
- Eating blood is also forbidden in the New Testament (Acts 15:29). The Christian church observed this regulation for centuries (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* V, 1, 26). It is still valid today.
- Health facts: While meat eating has certain disadvantages as compared to a vegetarian diet, some research on unclean food, especially pork, indicates that this food is even more disadvantageous than clean meat. God means well (Exod 15:26). 1 Cor 6:19-20 reminds us that we are stewards of our bodies.

## IV. Texts That Have Been Understood Differently

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|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Matt 15:11  | The issue is washing of hands (verses 2, 20) not unclean food.                                                                                                                      |
| 1 Cor 10:25 | Paul talks about food offered to idols not about unclean food (1 Cor 8:4; 10:27-28). Similarly Rom 14:2, 14, 20.                                                                    |
| Col 2:16    | Food laws are not a "shadow" (verse 17) that pointed to Jesus' life and ministry as the sacrificial laws were. However, food and drink sacrifices came to an end with Jesus' death. |
| 1 Tim 4:1-4 | Paul talks about false doctrines, e.g., the rejection of marriage and an ascetic lifestyle. The passage has nothing to do with biblical dietary laws.                               |

All these texts are not in opposition to the biblical teaching on clean and unclean animals

## Conclusion

Christians take seriously God's health recommendations—1 Cor 10:31. They honor God and observe his commandments, knowing that God loves them, has saved them, and wants them to have a rich and satisfying life (John 10:10). The biblical health laws are still valid, as is the moral law of the Ten Commandments, and are an expression of God's love and grace. We benefit by doing God's will.