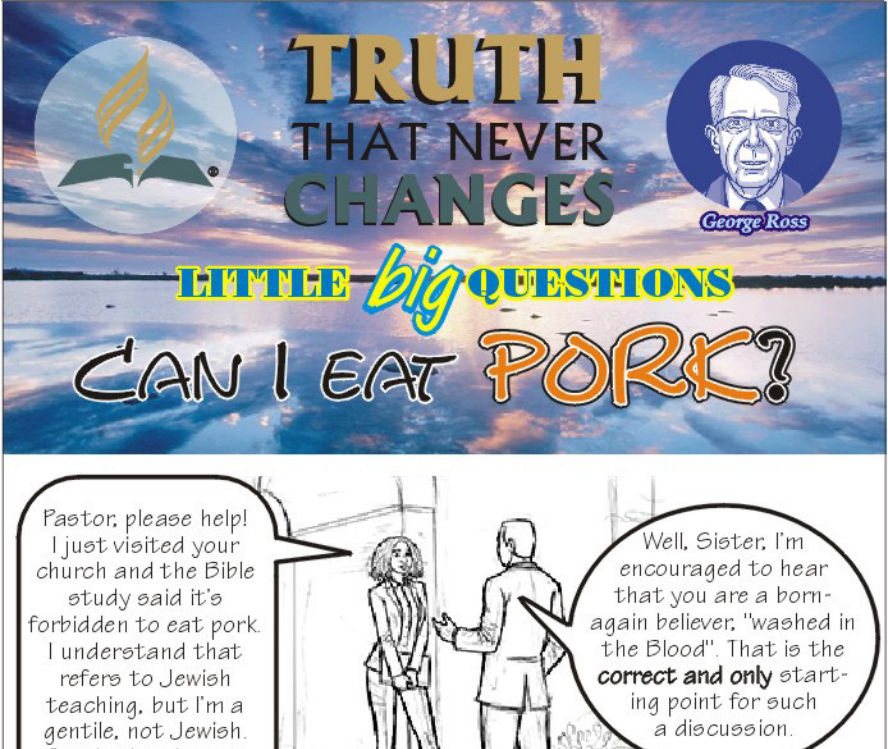
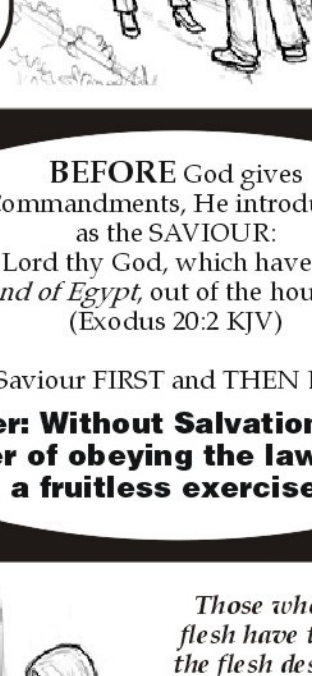




Pastor, please help! I just visited your church and the Bible study said it's forbidden to eat pork. I understand that refers to Jewish teaching, but I'm a gentile, not Jewish. Surely that has no impact on my faith as a born-again Christian?

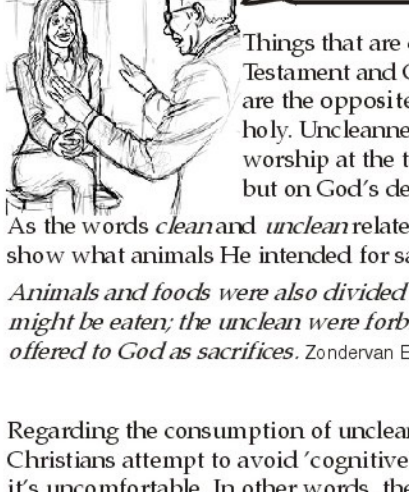


Well, Sister, I'm encouraged to hear that you are a born-again believer, "washed in the Blood". That is the correct and only starting point for such a discussion.

**BEFORE** God gives the Ten Commandments, He introduces Himself as the SAVIOUR: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Exodus 20:2 KJV)

He is Saviour FIRST and THEN Lawgiver.

**Remember: Without Salvation the whole matter of obeying the law is just a fruitless exercise.**



Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

I'm quoting Romans 8:5-8 for a background perspective.

OK! I understand you're not a Jew, but be sure to know that these promises are for CHRISTIANS – gentile Christians as well!

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:17, KJV)

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7:1)

So let's begin at the beginning. What does **unclean** mean?

Things that are called unclean (Hebrew *tame*) in the Old Testament and Greek *akathartos* in the New Testament are the opposite of things that are called clean, pure and holy. Uncleanliness prohibited a person from being able to worship at the temple. The emphasis was not on dirt, but on God's definition of what is pure.

As the words *clean* and *unclean* relate to animals, God used these categories to show what animals He intended for sacrifice and which could be eaten.

*Animals and foods were also divided into clean and unclean classes. The clean might be eaten; the unclean were forbidden. Only clean animals might be offered to God as sacrifices.* Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, 1991, p. 169

Regarding the consumption of unclean meat, many good Christians attempt to avoid 'cognitive dissonance', because it's uncomfortable. In other words, their lifestyle clashes with what they are reading! It is *hard* to change one's lifestyle. It is *much easier* to change the interpretation of the offending teaching! This can prompt people to adopt certain defence mechanisms when they have to confront the facts. For example, if church teachings point out such a contradiction, a person may discredit them by saying the teachings are untrustworthy, biased or non-Biblical.



Yet cognitive dissonance can also inspire a positive change in your behaviour or beliefs. For the thinking person these changes can be positive, such as moving away from problematic beliefs or harmful habits.

With Justification (being born-again) God gets us ready to hear His word, which is His clear direction for our life! So when I speak of a *clean and healthy body*, that's an important part of what we will have as a function of living a sanctified life.

The Bible gives laws that tell us not to eat meat from certain animals. These laws are found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. One example: pork is off the menu, as it is called 'unclean' in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

● As I've explained, these meats are called *akathartos* (unclean). God knows that what we eat matters, as He commands His people to be holy, separate from the world and devoted to Him.

This command to be *holy* includes to be *wholesome* and appears in Leviticus 11:44: *For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy; for I am holy.* This is reiterated for Christians in 1 Peter 1:15-16: *But as He who called you is Holy, you must also be Holy in all your conduct, since it is written: You shall be Holy for I am Holy.* God told Israel in Exodus 15:26: *If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you will pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you.*

● Scientific research today proves that eating and living like the Egyptians did lead to disease.

However, many people today think God's food laws are no longer important; they point to several scriptures that seem to indicate this. I list three in the next panel:

In Mark chapter 7 Jesus said there is nothing outside a person that, by going into him, can defile him;

In Romans 14 Paul said that nothing is unclean; and

In Acts 10 Peter received a vision where he was explicitly told to eat unclean animals based on these passages.

So many people believe that God's food laws have been done away with, they think we can eat whatever we want. *Really?!*



But are these passages **really** telling us we can eat things that God has forbidden? Well, actually it turns out... **they are not!**

There are two Greek words in the New Testament that are translated as unclean. One we already know: *akathartos*, which is translated as *unclean/impure*, and refers to things such as pork and shellfish, viz. things that are prohibited by God's law and that God says we should avoid eating in order to be Holy.

But there is another word that is sometimes translated as unclean. That is the word *koinos*, which means *common* or *defiled*. Jewish tradition held that foods could become defiled or *koinos* when they come into contact with certain things or certain people. Some Jewish groups in the first century, like the Pharisees, therefore avoided not just foods that were *akathartos*, i.e. foods prohibited by God's law, but also foods that were *koinos*, i.e. foods that have been defiled.

We need to be careful of translations! There is a big difference between 'unclean' and 'defiled'.

Jesus, Peter and Paul were not saying we don't have to obey God's food laws, they were saying that we don't have to obey extra-Biblical traditions about food.

Consider Mark 7. In this chapter the Pharisees criticise Jesus' disciples for rejecting a tradition of the elders, saying: "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled (*koinos*) hands?" (Mark 7:5)

● Because of their traditions the Pharisees thought that touching food with *koinos* hands made the food *koinos*, which then made the person *koinos* when he ate it.

The truth is Jesus accuses the Pharisees of rejecting and nullifying the Commandments of God for the sake of their traditions; it wouldn't make any sense for Jesus to criticise the Pharisees for rejecting God's commandments, while at the same time rejecting them Himself.

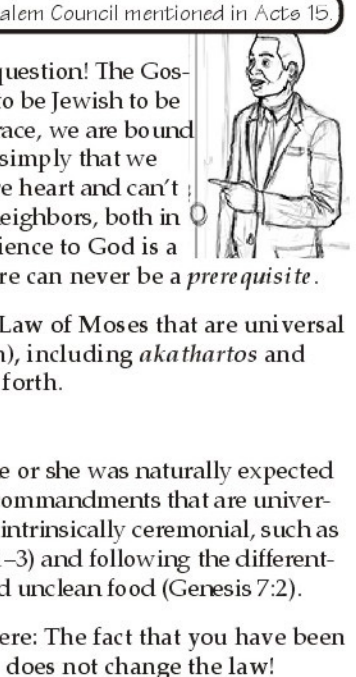
● So in Mark 7 Jesus did not reject God's food laws! He rejected the *tradition* that a person became defiled if he ate food that had been touched by defiled hands.



So what about Romans 14:14? *I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean.* It is unclean (*koinos*) for anyone who *thinks* it unclean. Again the word being translated as unclean here is not *akathartos*.

Paul is not addressing meats prohibited by God's law; rather he is talking about clean meat that was being sold in the Roman marketplace. Some Jewish believers refused to eat this meat because they thought it was defiled or *Koinos*.

● Why did they think it was defiled? Because it was *handled* by Gentiles.



Lamb or sheep is clean meat

## Koinos cannot be translated as **unclean**

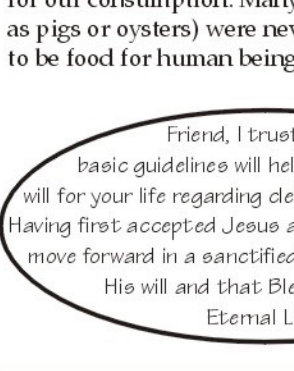
Yet we need to remember Jesus rejected this tradition! He said that *koinos* hands cannot make the food or the person who eats it defiled.

Paul likewise rejects this tradition. He says 'nothing is *koinos*'. He wants Jews and gentiles to fellowship together, even if some of the Jews have traditions that he disagrees with. So those he calls strong, those who agree with Jesus's teachings about *koinos*, to accommodate those he calls weak for the sake of unity.

● He tells the strong to avoid meat bought from the Gentile marketplace in front of people that believe it to be *koinos*, even though there is no such thing as food that is *koinos*.

Regarding *akathartos* (unclean) foods, we are not free from the law; and we are not free to disregard *koinos* (defiled) foods. Please note the difference between *defiled* and *unclean*! So in Paul's time there were believers who had a weakness when it came to this tradition of *koinos*. Paul was not saying that the Bible's food laws were optional or irrelevant; he was saying these extra-biblical traditions were optional. He encourages his readers to abide by these traditions when they are fellowshiping with the weak. Paul gave this instruction because he wanted Jews and Gentiles to be in unity.

**Let me put it in simple terms!** Don't allow any form of arrogance to get in the way of your testimony. If you are free to behave in a certain way and you know it is not wrong and you are not judged by it, don't deliberately behave in such a way as to confuse another dear soul who may well not feel the same about things as you do.



So then what about Acts 10? In that chapter Peter is shown a sheet filled with animals and a voice tells him to kill and eat. Peter responds: *By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common/koinos or unclean akathartos.*

So here with Peter both words, *koinos* and *akathartos*, are used, so it appears that God is telling Peter to kill and eat animals that are *akathartos*.

And does that mean that God is OK with us eating unclean animals? Well, let's look a little closer. Actually, God was not telling Peter to eat the unclean animals in the sheet, because nowhere in Scripture did God make unclean (*akathartos*) animals clean. He was telling him to eat the *koinos* meat. Verse 15 says: *What God has made clean do not call common.*

You see, Peter thought that he could not eat the clean animals in the sheet, because they were together with the unclean animals. He thought that the clean animals had become *koinos* or defiled, but that was not the case. God was telling him that these animals were clean even though they were surrounded by unclean *akathartos* animals.

● But the most critical thing about this vision is that it wasn't about animals at all, as we learn below.

## This vision had to do with people!

God wanted Peter to stop thinking he was defiled if he associated with Gentiles. The vision showed Peter that the social divisions between Jews and Gentiles were entirely man-made. As Peter said: *God has shown me that I should not call any person common/koinos, or unclean, or akathartos.* (Acts 10:28)

● Peter's vision had nothing to do with scrapping God's food laws. It had to do with accepting Gentiles as full members of the kingdom of God, rather than as unclean, second-class citizens.



**So does it matter what we eat?**

There are two full Old Testament chapters devoted to telling us what to eat and not to eat. The New Testament texts that seem to disagree with that in fact do not contradict them at all.

● The Word is arguing against extra-biblical traditions that formed unnecessary barriers between Jews and Gentiles.

## THE BIBLE DOES NOT ARGUE AGAINST ITSELF

OK, Pastor. But I see you didn't mention the Jerusalem Council mentioned in Acts 15.

Yes, Sister, this was an immense question! The Gospel had shown one did not have to be Jewish to be a Christian, yet being saved by grace, we are bound under the Law of Love, meaning simply that we 'obey God with a willing and pure heart and can't be arrogant towards our Jewish neighbors, both in and out of the church. But: Obedience to God is a product of our Salvation and by its very nature can never be a prerequisite.

● And let us not forget there are parts of the Law of Moses that are universal in time and practice (for all people on earth), including *akathartos* and *koinos*, laws about bestiality, incest and so forth.



Once the Gentile was born-again, he or she was naturally expected to do God's will by obeying those commandments that are universal, pre-Mosaic and not intrinsically ceremonial, such as the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3) and following the differentiation between clean and unclean food (Genesis 7:2).

● Let us be careful here: The fact that you have been saved (born again) does not change the law! (Matthew 5:17-18)

*I delight to do Thy Will. O my God: Yea. Thy law is within my heart. Psalm 40:8*

Pork is named as unclean in the Bible, yet pigs fall in the same zoological group as moles, mice, lizards, bats and catfish. Would you eat any of those? *Unclean foods* would not have been prohibited by God unless they were in some way fundamentally bad for us.

**Unclean foods are exactly that, and this did not change in the New Testament!**

It is often claimed that the Levitical food laws (Leviticus 11), which are not mentioned in Acts 15, are no longer binding for Christians. Yet in the context of Leviticus, these prohibitions mean the *renunciation of paganism*. Any foreigner who wished to live in Israel had to abdicate those pagan practices to which he or she had grown accustomed (Leviticus 18:30). Likewise, any believing Gentile who wished to join the church was required to take a firm stand against paganism.

Therefore, the issue is settled here in the infancy of Christianity, and for all time: We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, not by any conformity to the law, and such obedience only comes as a result of true faith, after the issue of salvation has been settled.

**Can we be any clearer than the five points I illustrate below?**

Sister, just a point before we go further. I understand your claim to salvation and to that I respond with hallelujah!, yet I refer you to 2 Corinthians 7:1, a vital component of your salvation: *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* In this verse, Paul urges Christians to purify themselves from anything that contaminates their body or spirit. He encourages them to do this out of love for God and to work toward complete holiness.

**The Five Crucial Points:**

**1 To have a clean and healthy body, I must eat clean food.**

**2 I must deal with powerful feelings of rebelliousness.**

**3 I must be alert to good Bible teaching.**

**4 I must persist in prayer and ask for guidance.**

**5 Then I will have peace by being submissive to God.**

Thank you, Pastor, for answering my needs in finding out about unclean foods!



## So, back to the title: Does it matter what we eat?

Yes—God created only certain animals for our consumption. Many others (such as pigs or oysters) were never intended to be food for human beings.

Friend, I trust these basic guidelines will help you find God's will for your life regarding clean and unclean foods. Having first accepted Jesus as my Saviour, I can now move forward in a sanctified life of submission to His will and that Blessed Hope of Eternal Life.



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