

OLD TESTAMENT DIETARY LAWS

The fact that a crab caused the death of one man because he refused to go to hospital when his family tried to persuade him early on in his ailment cannot be used to support the keeping of the dietary laws of the OT. The crab was infected with the deadly organism and the man was stubborn. Not all crabs are so infected. There have been many people who have been pricked by lobsters, crabs and catfish and were none the worse. Ask any housewife. One would not think of using these incidents to show that the OT was right in forbidding their use as food because they might hurt people who are preparing them for food.

What if a bull gored a man, and that made newspaper headlines? What about mad cow disease? Is that a sign from the Lord that we should now ignore OT teaching about what He allowed, and stop eating beef? In those early days when there was no hygienic control over foodstuffs such as we now have, Israel could easily have been decimated by disease if the Lord had not forbidden them to eat unclean food. Just as He knows what is good for us, He also knew what would be harmful to the Israelis under the conditions they lived. The Jews who became Christians traditionally kept the OT dietary laws. As for the Gentile Christians, during the Council meeting in Jerusalem, Peter (a true-blue Jew) said:

"Now, therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

What is that yoke but the ceremonial cleansings, washing of hands, and the multitudinous dietary laws that were outmoded by the coming of Christ the Messiah. These food laws are even followed today. Are we to eat 'kosher' food too?

Furthermore, the letter to the new converts arising from that Council meeting stated the four abstentions of things offered to idols, blood, things strangled and sexual immorality. The basis of this advice? **"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things"**

Acts 15:10, 28, 29

Mind you, even the stipulation about eating food offered to idols was modified by Paul in **1 Corinthians 8**. Doesn't that tell us something about the wisdom and liberty accorded to the Christian by being in Christ?

As for **1 Timothy 4**, it is fairly clear from a simple reading of the text that the advice is given in the context of demonic and erroneous doctrines characteristic of the last days. These include "forbidding to marry and abstaining from foods which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." By restricting the food available to the Christian to what is sanctioned in **Leviticus 11** and **Deuteronomy 14** is to read into the Timothy passage what one wishes to be there, not what is clearly taught. It is instructive here to refer to Peter's vision at Caesarea when he saw a great sheet let down from heaven. Mark what God said to Peter!

"In it (the sheet) 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.' But Peter said, 'Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.' And a voice spoke to him again the second time, 'What God has cleansed you must not call common.'"

Acts 10 : 12 - 15

(Note: '**koinos**' and '**akathartos**' are the Greek words used here. Just because 'akathartos' is also used of evil spirits is an interesting aside, not really relevant to what we are trying to understand from this passage.)

Comments: It is good to obey Scripture but make sure that what we want to obey is what is clearly taught in the entire Bible. Trying hard to keep the OT laws may seem a spiritual thing to do but one must be aware of the temptation to slide into a kind of salvation by works. In any case, one worries whether one has kept all the laws and is on the look-out for some other law to keep.

What did James say?

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."

James 2 : 10

What a daunting prospect and what a surrender of the liberating power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ taught so clearly in the Bible!

Swee Eng.
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