

for the meats that had been offered to idols to be sold in the marketplace after the offering.

Paul explained to the Church that an idol is nothing (verse 4), but that if a brother's conscience was troubled by the fact that the meat on the table had been offered to an idol, a brother of stronger conscience should not offend the weaker Christian by insisting on eating it (verses 7, 9-13).

Meats offered to idols—avoiding offense

It is against this backdrop that we should read Romans 14. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* explains it this way:

“In 1 Cor. 8 the problem of the strong versus the weak brother, as regards diet, is also dealt with. The letter to the Corinthians was written less than a year before that to the Romans. It seems reasonable to conclude that in 1 Cor. 8 and Rom. 14 Paul is dealing with essentially the same problem. In Corinthians the problem is identified as the propriety of eating foods sacrificed to idols. According to the ancient practice pagan priests carried on an extensive merchandise of the animal sacrifices offered to idols. Paul told the Corinthian believers ... that inasmuch as an idol was nothing there was no wrong, per se, in eating foods dedicated to it. ... Probably for fear of offending in this matter some Christians abstained from flesh foods entirely, which means that their food was restricted to ‘herbs,’ that is vegetables (see Rom. 14:2)” (vol. 6, pp. 634-635).

Paul summarizes: “Let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way” (Romans 14:13).

A different word translated “unclean”

Paul then goes on to explain that “there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (verse 14). Note that the word translated “unclean” here is not *akathartos*, the usual word for unclean meats, but rather *koinos*, a word normally translated “common,” sometimes referring to that which had died of itself

and had not been ritually slaughtered and bled.

The context here is not of foods defined as common in the Bible, but of those foods judged to be common by the conscience of the individual Christian. “To him who considers anything to be unclean [*koinos*], to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food [*broma*, the general word for food, not the word for meat] the one for whom Christ died” (verses 14-15).

Paul later states: “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” (verse 20). Obviously he doesn't mean that *all* things are pure in the universal sense, since some things (certain mushrooms, for example) are poisonous, and others (snakes and lizards, for example) are clearly unappetizing to most people as well as not being sanctioned in the Bible as good for food. These words are to be read in the context of secondary matters that are of no consequence in and of themselves, except in the matter of offense.

He then makes a summary statement: “It is good neither to eat meat [*kreas*, animal flesh] nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak” (verse 21). In other words, if you need to go vegetarian or to avoid alcohol or to do whatever is needed to avoid offending a brother, do it!

So we see that Romans 14 deals with practical matters of diet in the Greco-Roman pagan world and has nothing to do with the abolition of the law of clean and unclean meats.

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Does God Care What Meats We Eat?

God created all animals! But did He create all animals to be food for humans?

As He was winding up His discourse in Matthew 7, Jesus asked, “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:9-11).

Just as a physical father wants the best for his children—including giving them good things to eat—our Heavenly Father wants the best for us as well.

And just as our physical fathers taught us, God educates us on many aspects of living, and that includes which meats we can eat and those which He prohibits us from eating.

God defines clean and unclean meats

The meats God defines as *clean* and *unclean* are differentiated in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. This knowledge goes back much further, though, since Noah knew which animals were clean and unclean before the Flood (Genesis 7:2). Simply stated, God explains that:

Clean fish must have scales *and* fins. Bass, cod, flounder, grouper, salmon, snapper, trout and tuna

all fit this category. Since catfish, lobsters, crabs, shrimp and many other water creatures do not have fins *and* scales, God says we should not eat them.

Animals must have cloven (divided) hooves *and* chew the cud. These types of animals include antelope, cattle, goat, elk and deer. On the other hand, rabbits and pigs do not qualify as being clean and good to eat.

In Deuteronomy 14:11-18 we read that all clean birds may be eaten, but those we are not to eat include eagles, vultures, buzzards, falcons, ravens, os-triches, owls, seagulls, hawks, jackdaws (part of the crow family), storks and herons. Chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, quail and pheasants do not appear on

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this list of unclean birds and are considered *clean*—okay for us to eat.

Most insects are not good to eat, but God says some insects, such as locusts, grasshoppers and crickets, are okay to eat (Leviticus 11:22).

It is beyond the scope of this short explanation to enumerate every clean and every unclean animal.

“Be holy”

Many have tried to rationalize why God declared some animals to be good for human consumption while others are not. Some have pointed out various health benefits of avoiding the unclean foods.

However, God does not say that He gave these laws for health reasons, so better cooking methods today do not negate God's rules. Even if we don't totally

understand the reasons, God wants us to obey. Through the pen of the prophet Isaiah, God declares that His thoughts and His ways are *different* from ours (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The Levitical priesthood was given the responsibility to teach the people the difference between “the holy and the unholy” and to help them “discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23).

God declares that He is holy and wants us to be holy (Leviticus 11:45; 20:7) as His sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). John 1:12 and 20:17 and other scriptures also verify this concept. Our Father wants all of us, male and female, to be like Him—holy and clean.

Every father wants what is best for his children, and God is no exception. We cannot remain clean if we eat things that are unclean.

God has given some detailed instructions regarding which meats we are to eat and which ones we should avoid. He also leaves it to us to “discern between the unclean and the clean” when He does not explicitly mention every animal.

However, by examining their physical characteristics in light of God's Word, we determine whether they are fit for humans to eat. King Solomon wrote, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter” (Proverbs 25:2).

Because He loves us, God certainly does care what meats we eat, and we have His loving instructions and commandments to prove it. “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

Does Romans 14 Abolish the Law of Clean and Unclean Meats?

What is the real lesson and point of Romans 14?

Some claim that Romans 14 abolishes the law of clean and unclean meats of Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21. Is this true?

The context

First, let us notice the context. Romans 14 begins by telling us that some in the Church wanted to be vegetarians: “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” (verses 1 and 2).

We see from this that the points of dispute that were causing division were matters of little importance. Among them was vegetarianism (a subject not dealt with in the Old Testament). It's worth asking ourselves whether the apostle Paul would ever have referred to Old Testament injunctions as “doubtful things.”

More importantly, we must ask why any believer in the first century would choose to be vegetarian. Meat was expensive and highly desired as a part of one's diet back then, unlike today when meat is a staple in Western diets.

The key lies in a chapter that deals with similar matters and gives remarkably similar instructions. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul also wrote of Christians who chose to avoid eating meat. But here the reason was explicitly given: In the first century it was common