



By Joe Crews

Introduction

During my 46 years of ministry, largely in public evangelism, I have observed some interesting methods of Bible study. For example, many people diligently search the Scriptures, not to find truth, but simply to gather support for their preconceived religious ideas. Their minds are not open to be taught by God's Holy Spirit, and therefore they can manipulate the sacred texts to mean exactly what they want to believe.

One of the great, basic principles of Bible study is to search out the truth on any given subject from all the texts in the Bible. It is literally true that you can prove almost anything you want to prove by using a single, isolated text of Scripture. That is why it is so important to bring together the consensus of what Moses, David, Jesus, Paul and all other inspired authors have to say on the subject. That may involve a hundred or more verses! And even then, there still might be some confusion, because five or six of those hundred texts can always seem to contradict the rest.

So should those half-dozen aberrant verses be discarded since they don't harmonize with the others? No indeed. They should be given special study in the context of surrounding verses, and also in comparison with the 95 which are in agreement. Very quickly it will be discovered that the ambiguity exists only in the mind, and the total Bible picture is in perfect focus and unity.

Someone has said that a text without its context is a pretext, and I believe it. This is particularly true of several strange verses which have been a stumbling block to thousands of earnest Bible students. Under careful scrutiny, however, these "problem texts" are found to be in harmony with each other and also with the rest of the inspired record. Because these texts relate to diet -one of the most popular subjects on the public mind today- we shall seek to untangle some of the confusing questions which have been raised about forbidden foods and biblical health laws.

The four scriptures we shall examine are in apparent conflict with scores of other clear declarations scattered throughout the Old and New Testaments on the subject of proper diet. But before we begin, it is important to note some of the landmark points which God has made through the writings of His servants.

Entire chapters, such as Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, have laid down detailed listings of the clean and unclean categories of animals. And since the original diet prescribed by God included no meat whatsoever ([Genesis 1:29](#)), we can be absolutely certain that no forbidden, "unclean" meat was included in the diets of those who lived before the flood and followed God's law.

After the flood, even though clean animals were introduced to the diets of the eight survivors due to the universal destruction of all vegetation, no unclean animals were permitted for food. God commanded the preservation of clean animals in the ark by sevens and the unclean animals by twos ([Genesis 7:1-3](#)). Obviously, this allowed only for the clean category to be eaten, while the male and female of the unclean animals were preserved for perpetuating the species.

Incidentally, this post-diluvian per-mission to eat even the clean animals produced an interesting phenomenon. Almost immediately, the life span of the human race fell from around 800 years to about 150 years.

The flood experience also demolishes a popular argument used by those who insist on eating both clean and unclean animals. They claim that the law of unclean foods only applied to the Jewish people. This cannot be correct, since there were no Jews in Noah's day when the restriction was laid, by God Himself, upon all the human race. Furthermore, the Bible declares that the forbidden-meat law will still be in effect at the second coming of Jesus. ([Isaiah 66:15-17](#).)

It's Not What Goes In ...

But now, let's look at the four most popular arguments used to support the eating of unclean meats. In [Matthew 15:11](#), we find such a text which, at first sight, seems to support those arguments. Jesus said, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man."

Without consideration of the context, this verse seems to be saying that we may eat anything without being condemned or contaminated. But when we examine the entire chapter, we find that it has nothing to do with diet. From verse 2, we learn that Jesus was dealing with a controversy by the Pharisees, who insisted that the disciples give their hands a ceremonial washing before they ate food. The purpose of this bath was to cleanse away the defilement of touching any Gentile person or object. Christ condemned their hypocritical tradition in verses 3-10, declaring that they were worshipping Him in vain by teaching manmade laws. Then in verse 11, He made the statement about defilement coming out of man, not going in.

Afterward, Peter asked Jesus, "Declare unto us this parable." [Matthew 15:15](#). This statement proves that Christ's words were not to be taken literally, because a parable is merely a story or statement to illustrate a point. Notice how Jesus explained the meaning of His figurative statement: "Do not ye yet understand,

that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." Verses 17-20.

Now the whole story begins to clear up. Jesus knew that these religious leaders had murder in their hearts against Him, and yet their greatest concern was not over those evil dispositions, but only for a foolish tradition based on prejudice. Christ called those inward sins by name and then declared: "These are the things that defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." That was the meaning of His parable. It did not refer to eating food, but rather to ceremonial washing.

Some have been puzzled by the addition of three words in Mark's account of the same incident. There Jesus is quoted as saying, "It cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats." [Mark 7:18,19](#), emphasis added.

Does the expression "purging all meats" indicate that anything put into the body is somehow sanctified as wholesome and healthful? Of course not! Again, Jesus is highlighting the fact that true defilement comes from harboring spiritual uncleanness in the mind. Physical food passes through the purging processes of digestion and is separated from the body, while sin remains as a permeating poison.

Sanctified By Prayer?

Now we turn to another text which has been fearfully misinterpreted by certain Bible readers. Paul wrote to young Timothy: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." [1 Timothy 4:1-5](#).

By carefully considering the context of these words, we find nothing out of harmony with the rest of the Scriptures. Apparently some specific end-time group is described that forbids marriage, is full of hypocrisy, and is demon-controlled. In addition, this group commands its followers to abstain from obviously clean foods, "which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."

Our purpose here is not to dwell on the identity of these evil perverters of the gospel, but to dispel the idea that merely praying over food can make it good to eat. Paul affirms that any created thing in the food line is acceptable as long as it meets two tests -it must be approved (or sanctified) by the Bible, and it should be prayed over with thanksgiving. Please take note that both of these requirements must be met in order for the food to be suitable for the Christian diet. Incidentally, the word "meats" in the original language is not limited to flesh foods. The Greek word "broma" simply means "food."

Do these verses suggest that moles, bats, and rattlesnakes may be sanctified for food by simply praying over them? Quite the opposite! Nothing is made suitable unless it has passed the first test of being approved by the Word of God. If the Bible says it is clean, then and only then can prayers of thanksgiving be assured the seal of God's acceptance.

Creepy, Crawly Things

Perhaps the most common basis for the supposed cleansing of unclean meats is the story of Peter and his vision of the sheet let down from heaven. With a bit of background, however, we can clearly understand the true meaning of Peter's strange vision.

As a Jewish convert, Peter held the opinion that all Gentiles were unclean, and therefore unworthy of salvation. He would not preach to them or have any type of social interaction with them.

Peter received the vision just before messengers arrived at his Joppa home from Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. God had instructed Cornelius to send for Peter, and his servants were practically at Peter's door when the faithful apostle fell into a trance on the rooftop.

In that vision, Peter saw a great sheet descending from heaven, filled to overflowing with all kinds of beasts, birds, and creepy-crawly animals. Three times Peter was invited to eat the disgusting collection of creatures, and three times he refused. Each time a voice declared, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." [Acts 10:15](#). Finally, the sheet was lifted back into heaven with its cargo of wriggling varmints.

At this point, we should make some crucial observations. Peter's response to the invitation to eat establishes a very important point. He said, "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." [Acts 10:14](#). This proves that during his entire three and one-half years with Jesus, Peter had never seen or heard anything that made him accepting of unclean meats. In other words, Jesus had not changed the prohibition against eating the forbidden animals, because if He had, Peter

would have known about it and would not have responded as he did.

In fact, the context of Acts chapter 10 reveals that Peter at first did not understand the meaning of the perplexing vision. Verse 17 says that "Peter doubted in himself" what it meant. And again, verse 19 says that "Peter thought on the vision."

While he was trying to figure it out, the three servants sent by Cornelius knocked on Peter's door. He listened to their account of Cornelius' vision, then lodged the men. The next day Peter returned with them to Caesarea, where Cornelius had his family and friends gathered to welcome the apostle.

The crux of the entire narrative is found in verse 28, where the previously blinded fisherman-disciple tells how the vision had been explained to him. He addressed the Gentile assembly with these words: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." [Acts 10:28](#), emphasis added.

Here we plainly see that God had used the vision of the sheet to teach the prejudiced Peter that he should no longer shun the Gentiles. The vision had nothing to do with eating and drinking. It was addressing Peter's attitude toward people, not toward food.

What a dramatic lesson for that early church! And it's a lesson that all of us should learn, also. From this moment on, be quick to correct those who try to apply this vision to any cleansing of unclean animals. It actually proves the opposite, and then presses home one of the greatest lessons for Christians everywhere—count every individual of equal worth before God, and make every effort to win that one to Christ.

Stumbling Block to the Weak

The final set of verses which need to be studied in their context is found in Romans 14. Because many readers have lifted words and phrases out of their logical setting in this chapter, some strained interpretations have been created.

There is a very important common theme running through the chapter. Almost every verse relates to the subject of judging, a problem which was most malignant in the early Christian church, even as it is in the modern church today. In order to understand the counsel given by Paul in Romans 14, we must first recognize the parties involved in the judging and the issues over which the judging was taking place.

There were two main groups in the early church -the Jewish Christians who had been converted from Judaism, and the Gentile Christians who had been won from heathenism. These two groups did not get along very well. They were constantly judging each other. Now let's notice what the division was all about. The Gentile Christians judged the Jewish Christians because they were eating meat which had been offered in sacrifice to idols. To the Gentile convert, such food was unfit to be eaten. Even though he was now a Christian, he could not forget how he once offered food to idols, and in his mind the eating of such food was connected to idol worship. The Jewish convert, on the other hand, had no such compunctions because he had always acknowledged only one God, and naturally felt no guilt about eating the meat which had been sacrificed to idols. It was sold in the market place at a cheaper price, and the Jewish Christians considered it a desirable bargain.

Now let's read the first few verses of Romans 14 concerning the brother who was weak in the faith. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" [Romans 14:1-4](#).

Can we, by comparing other Scriptures, locate the weak brother? Can we also locate the problem which created the "judging" situation? Yes, we can. Paul had to deal with it at considerable length in 1 Corinthians 10 and 1 Corinthians 8. Notice his description: "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. ... Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. ... But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." [1 Corinthians 8:4-9](#), emphasis added.

Here we locate the weak brother of [Romans 14:1-3](#). He was the Gentile Christian who felt that it was sinful to eat the meat which had been offered to idols. Paul agreed with the Jewish converts that there was nothing wrong with the food, since there is only one God after all. But he advised that the food not be eaten in front of the Gentile believers lest it be a stumbling block to them. Compare this language with Paul's counsel in [Romans 14:13](#): "Judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."

In [1 Corinthians 8:11, 12](#), Paul asks this question: "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ." Compare that statement with this one in [Romans 14:15](#): "Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died." Also read [Romans 14:21](#): "It is gooder to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."

Obviously the accounts in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 are referring to the same problem. Identical language is used in describing them, and the same judging was taking place in reference to the problem.

One more point needs to be clarified. The meat in question was not "unclean meat" in the biblical sense. The question only revolved around food that was "esteemed" unclean by the Gentile Christians because it had been offered to idols. Actually, the heathen did not offer swine or other unclean animals in their sacrifices, as [Acts 14:13](#) establishes. So when the Jewish Christians bought the food which had been offered to idols, it was not wrong in itself, as Paul pointed out. It became wrong only when it offended the "weak brother," or the Gentile Christian, who esteemed it to be unclean through association with the idol. Some of the Gentile believers were so strong against it that they abstained from meat altogether and ate only herbs for fear they might eat some meat that had been offered to idols. In [Romans 14:1-3](#), Paul urges the Roman church to receive such people and honor their conscience. It was not a moral issue and should not be permitted to divide the church.

By examining these apparent contradictions in the Bible relating to diet, we have also discovered the root of much theological confusion in today's religious world. A simple understanding of the circumstances behind the writing enables us to grasp the words and phrases in their original format and to recognize the beautiful harmony and unity of Scripture.

Meats Unfit for Human Consumption

Ponder this significant fact carefully. If certain animals were identified as unclean before the flood; if they were still counted as unclean when Peter rejected them in his vision; if they are still called unclean in [Revelation 18:2](#), where it speaks of "unclean" birds; and if Isaiah declares that all who are eating swine and the abomination at the time of the second advent will be consumed ([Isaiah 66:15-17](#)), how can we feel that they are now fit to eat? When did they become clean?

Did God have a reason for forbidding the use of certain animals for food? He never acts in an arbitrary way. We have no indication that the proscription was based on ceremonial, or shadowy, issues. As far as we can determine, all of the forbidden categories are so classified because God wanted His people to be healthy and happy. They simply were not suitable for human consumption, and God told His people not to use them as such.

This conclusion is verified by the findings of modern nutritionists, who have identified many of the "unclean" meats as heavy with deleterious fat or disease elements. In ancient times, God accused His

people of destroying themselves for lack of knowledge ([Hosea 4:6](#)), and promised freedom from disease if they followed His laws ([Exodus 15:26](#)). Why should we continue the destructive rebellion which marked the course of Israel's past?

The One who made our bodies has also supplied an operating manual for the proper maintenance of these delicate organisms. Just as Israel's frequent apostasies often involved "eating and drinking" ([Exodus 31:5](#)), so God's modern Israel goes astray in the same indulgent fashion. There are strong reasons to believe that God considered those health laws to preserve the body temple equally as important as the moral principles of the written law.

Two Thousand Swine Wasted

We have already established that Jesus never communicated any change in the dietary laws to Peter and the disciples. Now we need to examine an incident in the life of the Master which will show clearly whether or not He regarded the unclean animals as appropriate food.

But first, let's review a principle which appeared often in the ministry of our Lord. He was never wasteful. In fact, we can agree with the writer who described Jesus as a "God of Economy." We recall how He commanded the gathering of all the scraps of food following the feeding of the multitudes. On two occasions, Christ specifically ordered that nothing be thrown away. The Scriptures even detail the exact number of baskets of food which were salvaged from the two mountain-side miracle feedings—12 and seven. ([Luke 9:17](#), [Mark 8:20](#)). With this firm principle in mind concerning our Lord's disposition to conserve every tiny bit of edible food, please consider His experience with the inhabitants of Gadara. With His disciples, Jesus had embarked on a rather harrowing voyage across a wild, tumultuous sea. In their extremity of fear and despair the disciples had awakened Jesus from His peaceful sleep in the bottom of the storm-tossed boat. Standing in their midst, Christ commanded the elements to cease their raging, and there was an immediate calm.

When the ship reached the opposite shore, the little company was confronted with an even greater threat. A naked, demon-possessed madman came rushing out of the tombs as though to attack them. What followed is one of the most unusual encounters in the record of the gospels. For the only time in the Scriptures, Jesus briefly dialogued with the demons who controlled the frenzied victim. When the legion of evil spirits requested to be cast out into a nearby herd of swine, Jesus granted their request. While the nameless man sat at Jesus feet, now fully restored and fully clothed, the herd of 2,000 swine rushed headlong into the sea and drowned.

Many have marveled at this extraordinary turn of events. Why did Jesus precipitate the wholesale

destruction of that valuable herd of animals? Was He aware of circumstances which related to the owners and their very un-Jewish occupation as hog-tenders? It seems so. But one thing appears beyond all question; Jesus did not consider the swine to be suitable for food. Would the One who commanded leftovers to be gathered from the feast destroy enough pigs to feed a small army? It is impossible to believe that our compassionate Saviour would needlessly allow such a waste of resource when the hungry and needy were on every side. We can only conclude that Jesus did not view the animals, which His Father had declared an abomination, as acceptable items of diet.

As recent nutritional research has been publicized along with recommendations from government health agencies, more and more people are turning away from eating animal products. The very latest releases assure us that Americans consume too much fat and too little fruits and vegetables. It is most encouraging to see a gradual change in the eating habits of millions who have been influenced by either the Bible counsel on proper diet or the directives of government committees on health.

Is it wise to carefully scrutinize the labels of all food items before putting the contents into our bodies? Indeed, we would be almost foolhardy not to examine the list of ingredients in the products which find their way into our stomachs. Often we discover that some of the biblically forbidden animals have been utilized in the manufacture of some very common household staples. Let me share with you what I learned about the chief component of one very popular product.

Of Pig Grease and Pride

Quite some time ago I read a gripping story of mission adventures among the fierce Stone Age tribes of New Guinea.

One recurring reference throughout the narrative made a deep impression on my mind, and that was the aboriginal practice of smearing pig grease and soot on the face for beautification purposes.

The proud South Pacific tribesmen called themselves "Lords of the Earth," and the use of the cosmetic mixture was a settled tradition of their pagan culture.

But now I must tell you why that particular custom made such an impact on my mind. Just before reading the book, I had conducted an evangelistic crusade in New Orleans, Louisiana. One of the young men who was baptized in that series had been employed for several years at a local rendering plant.

He shared some very interesting facts with me concerning his particular duties at the plant and how its product was later marketed.

After I explain the process involved, you will probably appreciate the relief this man felt upon finding other employment just before my crusade began.

In my conversations with him I discovered for the first time what a rendering plant really is. It is a collection center for all kinds of dead animal bodies. Carcasses of every variety are hauled to the plant daily. Some are wild creatures that have been killed on the highway, such as skunks, opossums, etc. Huge supplies of the decaying bodies come from farms where disease has decimated herds of swine, cattle, and other domesticated animals.

At the plant, the bodies were all dumped together into a huge cooking pot which generated intense heat. After a certain period of cooking, the bodies were subjected to a process of extreme pressure in order to extract the fat from bones, skins, etc. It is the rendered fat which constitutes the final product of the plant.

According to my friend's account, no one can imagine the horrible stench of the diseased and decaying conglomeration of cooking carcasses. But the thing which interested me the most was the way in which the extracted grease is utilized. The great majority of the stuff was sold to the manufacturers of lipstick and eye makeup. He named two of the most prestigious cosmetic companies in the country as the chief customers of the rendering plant. Anyone looking at the elegant ads portraying glamorous women wearing the colorful "grease" on their faces would never suspect the true origin of their cover-up.

Is there really a lot of difference between the beauty program of those South Pacific and modern "civilized" people? Are not the practices of both based upon the same principle of human pride? In one case the pig grease has been refined, colored, and properly perfumed; the other has stayed closer to nature and is used unrefined.

But the main point I want to emphasize is how so many millions of fine Christian ladies are ingesting that abominable blend without realizing what it contains. This is only one example of similar concoctions which have found their way into the homes and bodies of untold millions.

Yet, in the final analysis, we must reject the indulgence of forbidden foods not because they are distasteful or unhealthy, but because God says they are not to be taken into the body temple. May the Bible principles unfolded in this book form the basis of our Christian lifestyle: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." [1 Corinthians 10:31](#).