

Fundamentals of Belief  
#14B: Clean and Unclean Foods in the New Testament

Edited Sermon Transcript  
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This afternoon, we are going to continue on Fundamental of Belief number fourteen which we began last time that I spoke with you. I mentioned toward the end of the last sermon that I was going to expand this topic beyond just clean and unclean meats. When Mr. Armstrong wrote fundamental number fourteen, he used the term "unclean foods" as opposed to specifically meats. This provides me with the opportunity to expand this topic to other dietary considerations that we should be concerned about as Christians—not just clean and unclean meats.

In the last sermon, I alluded to the fact that I felt like, in the next sermon, we would get into the topic of some other things, and I specifically mentioned sugar. It is amazing how many people have come up to me since then, anticipating what is now being called my "sugar sermon." Well, I am going to make you wait for another couple of weeks. As it turns out, I have enough material left that I need to cover on the topic of meats, that I am not going to be able to get into the other dietary topics. All of those sermon notes are prepared, waiting and ready, but I am going to have to hold you off until next time.

Let me quote again number fourteen of the Fundamentals of Belief of the Church of God, The Eternal:

We believe that certain foods called "unclean" are not to be eaten under any circumstances as they are harmful to body and health and also violate our bodies which are called the temple of the Holy Spirit of God.

Let's begin, as we did last time, with that very passage from 1 Corinthians 3:16–17:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

Lest we take it for granted or fail to recognize the real significance of that statement, God did create these human bodies, first and foremost, repositories for His Holy Spirit. He did not create us as human beings so that we can fulfill the whims of the flesh according to our own lusts. Not at all. That is exactly what all human beings have always done. That is what Adam and Eve did from the very beginning, but that is not why God created us. He created us to fulfill His will, to obey His laws, and to fulfill the very purpose of entering into the God-Family—achieving that salvation.

These physical bodies, when they are used according to God's intent for His purpose and will, are a vehicle to keep His commandments and laws. They are repositories for His Holy Spirit, which is given as a gift, allowing us to work to become like Jesus Christ in His example. It is human beings, according to our own rebelliousness against God's law, who then pervert and use those bodies for the wrong uses. That has everything to do with the topic today, because it includes the things that we eat that God did not ordain to be food at all and are actually harmful for these bodies.

For those of us, however, who are concerned about actually fulfilling God's law, who care to keep His commands, then we recognize that our human fleshly bodies are the temples of God. They are there for a purpose—to house the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit which is given to the called as a great gift. We are to be in His service as His instruments in order to set that example for His way of life and to fulfill His will. How are we to do that if we are paying the prices in the flesh for illness that we bring upon ourselves because of eating things that are not food and not taking care of these bodies properly? We become incapacitated from being able to do God's will when we pay the penalties that come from sin.

The thing that most people in the world do not understand, brethren, is that God's health laws are not a curse. The commands that God gave concerning clean and unclean meats and everything else that He ordained to be good and those things He ordained not to be good, are not just there to be a fiery hoop we have to jump

through in order to prove that we are going to obey. Yes, they can certainly be tests in that regard—to prove whether we will bend to the will of God—but we need to recognize, first and foremost, that God gave us those commands for our own good. He gave us the health laws actually to be a great blessing. Why? Because He designed these bodies physically in such a way that eating the right things produces health and eating the wrong things produces illness, disease, pain and all manner of suffering.

We are serving a God of love, brethren. He doesn't desire for bad things to happen to us, and He doesn't want us to suffer. We need to get the idea out of our minds that those restrictions that He gave on diet are there just to see whether we will be faithful. That is a part of it, but even more so, we must recognize that these are the laws that govern our bodies. Recognize and abide within them, and we can have health. Defy and react negatively toward those commands of God, and we will pay the automatic penalties. As I have said to you before, God does not sit up on His throne and, when we eat something wrong or do something incorrectly, zaps us with a lightning bolt or somehow inflicts a personalized penalty. We pay the automatic penalties, in many regards, that God has built into this universe—this physical world. They govern these physical bodies.

Those who come to understand the value of the health laws contained in the Bible are those who can have the benefit of the blessings which come with obedience. They are the automatic blessings that God has built in for those who abide by the laws that govern our bodies chemically.

So, God's health laws are not a curse. They can seem like a curse to us because we want to eat the things that we want, and it seems like a restriction for us to be withheld the things that we want. We must recognize that God has only given to us the things that are good and for our admonition. If we are called, we have an opportunity to understand the value of those laws that all other human beings at this time do not understand. Those laws are for our good.

Ecclesiastes 5:18–19:

Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.

So, eating and drinking is not sin. God intended for us to eat, drink and enjoy the fruit of the labor of our work. God wants us to be happy. He wants us to be fulfilled and satisfied. He could have given us food that was strictly utilitarian in purpose, with no taste whatsoever, but He provided incredible abundance in the food that He has deemed to be good. He did so to satisfy the variety of our tastes and to allow us to really enjoy the process of eating and feeding those bodies—keeping them strong.

. . . it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.

God has created a system, including the mechanisms of these wonderfully made human bodies. They are governed according to physical laws which determine whether we have health or whether we have illness. Those of us who have the opportunity to understand the value of God's laws can then take advantage of those blessings that God offers to His people to enjoy the things that He made for our health and benefit.

3 John verse 2:

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." John is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The will of God is that we do have health, that we live in health and prosperity and every good thing that He desires. He doesn't desire for us to be burdened with all manner of evil and the penalties—both spiritually and physically—that come from pursuing our own ways. He wants us to have the good things—just as a parent desires, above all else, for their children to have the benevolent mercies and good things that come from living up to the requirements of God's law. Even though it often seems to children like the parents are just being hard and restrictive—doing things, setting rules and boundaries that appear to be for no other reason than for the parent's opportunity to instruct or use authority.

It often takes children until the time of their own adulthood before they realize that their parents really did have their best interest at heart. They weren't trying to do anything wrong or bad to them; they weren't trying to keep good things from them

whatsoever. Their intent all along was to save them from paying the prices that come from disobedience to God's law—those penalties which are automatic in many, many cases. So it is with God, in His dealing with each one of us as His children.

With that in mind, let's look into a couple of other Old Testament provisions concerning meats. We want to complete the topic that we began last time. We went through Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 concerning the specific instructions that God gave for clean and unclean meats. We also saw that those rules and regulations did not originate at Mt. Sinai with Israel at all. We saw the scriptures that say that God designated a distinction between clean and unclean animals as far back as the time of Noah, with regard to those animals that were put upon the arc. There were seven pairs of clean animals versus one pair of unclean animals. The distinction was made from the very beginning because these human bodies were created from the very beginning. From the time that Adam was created and put on the earth, God created those physical laws which govern health. They applied from the very beginning.

We will notice a couple of other very important rules to supplement those things that we went through. Last time, we went through the specifics of the laws of clean and unclean meats—land animals, fish, fowl, insects and others. Now, let's notice another couple of very clear restrictions that God gave as a blessing to the Israelites.

Leviticus 7:23–27:

"Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Ye shall eat no manner of fat, of ox, or of sheep, or of goat." Here, we are speaking of clean animals that meet the definition for human consumption according to the rules in Leviticus 11. Yet, even of a clean animal, here is a restriction that you cannot eat everything that is a part of that animal. God further restricted and designed these bodies to be able to handle only certain portions of even a clean animal. The fat of a clean animal is detrimental to human health.

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Ye shall eat no manner of fat, of ox, or of sheep, or of goat. And the fat of the beast that dieth of itself, and the fat of that which is torn with beasts, may be used in any other use: but ye shall in no wise eat of it. For whosoever eateth the fat of the beast, of which men offer an offering made by fire unto the [Eternal], even the soul that eateth it shall be cut off from his people.

Obviously, in the time of ancient Israel, there was a specific civil penalty attached to such rebellion for anyone who would violate this commandment and law. Some think that since, today, we are not under the civil law governing ancient Israel, there is no such restriction. That is a restriction that God built in, not just as a test of obedience for ancient Israel, but because He created these human bodies not to be able to metabolize fat. Even in the medical system, the doctors recognize the problems that are caused from eating fat. I don't think they understand it nearly as much as they could or should, but God provided this very blessing in a command to let us know that we should avoid eating the fat. It is a poison to our bodies. Our bodies were not designed in any way to be able to handle fat.

One question that was asked in a recent Bible study was, what about chicken skin? Although it wasn't anything that necessarily was addressed in times past in the Church, it is very likely that God intended for us to avoid chicken skin as well. It is very fatty and probably contains exactly the same attributes as the fat of clean beasts that should be avoided. It is just better to avoid it, brethren.

Let's notice, in verse 26, the next important command.

Leviticus 7:26–27:

Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people.

A civil penalty was enforced upon the Israelites for disobeying this command as well, but even more so, brethren, it is a law that is written into our very human bodies. The chemistry of our bodies is designed so that any ingestion of blood is a curse to us. This is very contrary to many civilizations around the world that consider blood a delicacy in different foods that they make, whether it be sausages or mixtures in liquid. Men always prove that they can pervert any of God's laws. It is something that we have to be careful of. There are certain foods that actually contain a significant amount of blood by design, and God said not to eat the blood; it is a poison to us. We absolutely have to avoid it.

That leads into something else. Another question that has come up occasionally is, what about organ meats? What about the liver? The liver is the primary filtering system of the body. Most of the poisons that are filtered out of an animal's system, even a clean animal, are going to be found resident in the liver. That is not an ideal

thing to put into our bodies. That is the portion of the system, as God created it, which actually cleanses the meat of a clean animal for our consumption. So, why would we want to eat the liver itself? Furthermore, the liver has a high percentage of blood. That is the greatest makeup of the liver in all animals because that is exactly the way the liver cleanses the blood. It is full of blood, so it very likely violates the principle of not eating blood.

The original ruling in the Church years ago was to avoid organ meats, although I don't know how publicized it was. That means the liver, kidneys, gizzards, intestines, brains and all of these other organs that most of us would avoid anyway, but there are some who do consider those things delicacies. Yet, from the original teaching in the Church, we are to avoid eating the organs of even a clean animal.

Now, let's move into what I am going to call misunderstood scriptures in the New Testament concerning the health laws of clean and unclean meats. Recognize that the intent of human beings who are not called is to find justification for everything that they possibly can in order to eat what they want and do what they want. They want to fulfill every whim of the flesh and still believe in some way that it meets God's requirements. They believe they can have a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ but still do everything they want to do. That is exactly where this concept of "doing away with the law" comes from. It is the desire to be called a Christian, to have the label of being a good Christian, and yet to be able to repudiate everything that God laid down in His Word for our admonition. It is no different with the numerous attempts made in order to justify that the New Testament Church was not under the obligation to abide by the Old Testament health laws.

Just remember, as I have already said, that very orientation to begin with fails to recognize the fact that these human bodies were created. They are wonderfully made machines. They are physical, and they are driven by very complex chemical processes; and the fuel we put into these bodies has everything to do with how that machine functions. As I said last time, we don't even think twice about that principle when we buy a new car. We know that there is only a certain type of fuel that will work acceptably in that vehicle, don't we? We don't question that a bit. So, we are very careful—especially with the amount of money we spend for a vehicle these days—that we put the right kind of fuel in it. We want that vehicle to last. We don't want it to grind to a halt prematurely. We would never put diesel oil in a gasoline engine, would we? Of course not.

So, how is it that human beings fail to recognize that their own human bodies are the most complex, miraculous, and wonderful machines that have ever been designed and that they also are subject to physical laws which govern their health? You can't put just any fuel into it that you want to. You can't feed it with anything you desire and think it is going to function the way it was designed. That is the entire orientation of those who want to refute God's health laws.

We are going to go through those New Testament scriptures that are often used to try and say that the laws of clean and unclean meats are not applicable for Christians today. All they are doing is denying the fact that those laws had a greater purpose than just a test for obedience. People don't believe that those laws governed human health; they just think it was that old, hard God in the Old Testament who put a string of do's and don'ts in front of His people to see if they would do them or not. Therefore, they want to be out from under that obligation altogether. How much better health would human beings have today if they minimally recognized that they must meet those obligations and requirements that God laid down for their health?

Let's look at the first one in Matthew 15:10–11:

And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

The churches of this world and people who want to repudiate Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 will say, "See, Jesus Christ said that it is not what goes into the mouth, but what comes out of it that defiles a man. Christ was saying that it doesn't matter what you put into these human bodies; it is all considered good food. God intended us to have carte blanche approval in order to feed them with whatever we want." Is that what Jesus Christ is saying here?

Back up to verse 1, and let's put it in context and see.

Matthew 15:1–3, 7–11:

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

What is the topic here? What is the whole subject that is being addressed? What contention was it that Jesus Christ was actually responding to? Was this an issue about clean and unclean meats? Were these Pharisees and scribes accosting Christ for the fact that His disciples were keeping Old Testament laws, while they were trying to do away with them? Hardly. In fact, the Pharisees were the ones who went above and beyond. You can bet that these very men who were coming and accosting Christ were absolutely obeying the health laws. They were very conscientious about what they were putting into their bodies.

"Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread." We are talking about a contention over a pharisaic ritual of hand-washing before eating.

But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? (Verse 7) Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

What are we talking about here, brethren? We are not talking about clean and unclean meat; we are talking about the hypocrisy of those who had added to God's law by the creation of their own traditions—the tradition of hand-washing. In all likelihood, we are not talking about normal hand-washing like you and I do before we sit down to eat. No, we are talking about ritualistic hand-washing that the Pharisees and scribes had adopted that went right back to pagan practices. They probably acquired and assimilated it into their religion from the influence of the Egyptians.

There are records that indicate that the Egyptians, during the Hellenistic influence, had ritualistic hand-washing, and it was very demonic in nature. They would wash all the way up to the elbows and in such a way as to cleanse demons out of the fingertips, so that when eating, they wouldn't be ingesting evil spirits.

That is what we are talking about here. This is what Christ was actually dealing with. The Pharisees—who considered themselves the experts on the law and how to worship God, not recognizing who they were contending with—were calling the disciples into question because they were not engaging in these pagan rituals.

Christ emphasized this fact by saying, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." Yes, they were very religious in appearance. In all of their behavior on the surface, they appeared to be close to God and fulfilling His will. However, because they were taking license to change God's law, to add to it what they wanted, to interpret it in their own way, they were actually anything but close to God. Christ was pointing out the rank hypocrisy of their very orientation. That is why He said, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." What was it that had the potential of going into the mouth? A little bit of dirt.

We are not talking about eating pork or snake or any kind of unclean meat. No, you can bet that the disciples were eating clean food. The question was, were they ingesting some kind of poison because they were not washing their hands as the Pharisees thought that they should? No.

Christ said, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." What was He speaking of? That which comes out of the heart and mind of a human being. What defiles each one of us, brethren, is when we use the natural gifts that God gave us, but we turn to our own thinking and rationale. That is what originates in our very hearts and minds, and that is what defiles us and separates us absolutely from God. It is our sin, the transgression of His commandments and laws, which separates us from God—not the avoidance of certain man-made traditions that God never intended for us to use. "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Now, were the commandments that are found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 the commandments of God or men? Were those not the very words of God that were given to Moses in order to teach Israel the laws of clean and unclean meats? Then, that is not what Christ is criticizing at all here, is it? Christ is criticizing the commandments of men that are pawned off as the commandments of God—those things that God didn't give at all but were added out of the human hearts and minds of the Pharisees and scribes. Ritualistic hand-washing was an added tradition that had nothing to do with a command of God. The commands of God concerning clean and unclean meats are unquestionably that which proceeded from God. "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." This is absolutely not a justification for the Church to be able to eat those things that God deemed to be unclean.

What is the next one? Let's turn to Acts 10:9. This is probably the most prolific example that is used to try and do away with God's health laws. You will recognize it as the story of Peter's vision.

Acts 10:9–17, 19–20, 25–28, 34–45:

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

So, others will tell you, "See, here God was showing Peter in a vision that now, those old, antiquated Old Testament health laws concerning clean and unclean meats do not apply to the Church. Now that Christ died, was resurrected and became our High Priest, none of those things apply to Christians anymore." I remind you again, brethren, think about it logically. By Christ's death, burial and resurrection, did God change the chemistry of our human bodies? Or, are we exactly, physically, just as God created Adam from the beginning?

Because of the abuses and the breaking of God's laws generation after generation during the last six thousand years, we are much further degenerated. However, does anyone believe that the chemistry within our human bodies has changed since our first ancestors, Adam and Eve? If our bodies are made up of exactly the same chemical processes as God designed from the beginning—and those health laws were given in order for man to have health and to feed these bodies the nutrients they need in order to work properly and avoid illness—how can the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ change those chemical processes? How can they apply only to ancient Israel, but not to the Church today? Again, the only way that any of us can make that conclusion, is if we believe God gave the health laws strictly to be an obstacle or a hoop for man to jump through, and that they have no direct bearing on physics or chemistry within the human makeup.

And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

People jump on this one very readily. "See, all of these wild beasts and creeping things that Peter saw in the vision, God said we are not supposed to call those things unclean. That means they are wide open now for us to consume to our hearts' content." Is that what God was telling Peter?

This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean . . .

Right away, we find out that even after God instructed him through this vision, Peter himself didn't understand exactly what it meant. Obviously, it was a vision concerning unclean animals, and God told him to kill and eat, but Peter did not jump to a conclusion of what God was saying. He knew the health laws. He knew that those animals that God had originally created to be poison to the human body were still poison to the human body; so he was perplexed and troubled. He didn't grab it and say, "Hallelujah, now God has thrown off the mantle, and we can go out and eat pork, shellfish, and everything our hearts desire." Peter understood the depth of the value of those health laws, and he was troubled because he did not yet understand what the purpose of this vision was or what it meant.

Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate . . .

Peter is just about to find out exactly what God was really telling him and what the meaning of the vision was. Peter did not assume the vision meant that unclean meats were now approved. He doubted in himself what the vision meant, and as the servants of Cornelius were requesting that Peter go with them, then God told him. Skip down to verse number 19.

Verses 19–20:

While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

The purpose of this vision was to prepare Peter for this encounter and this opening for something miraculous that God was doing.

Verses 25–28:

And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them . . .

Here is Peter's reaction. He is faced with this household of non-Israelites—Gentiles—who want to be ministered to. This had never happened before, and Peter is very uncomfortable. Yet, because God prepared him with the vision that he had just seen, he knew finally what God was telling him.

And he said unto them, 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.

What was the purpose of the vision—to tell Peter that he was now free to eat pork? Peter tells us himself exactly what the meaning of the vision was. All we have to do is pay attention and take it at face value. ". . . God hath shewed me that I [can eat pork]." Is that what he said? ". . . God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

The vision that Peter saw was not about animals at all. Those unclean animals represented the human beings that had been considered unclean to the Israelites. They were not to have any association or fellowship with them. Remember, God was very determined to keep Israel separate as a holy nation so that they would not be compromised or polluted by the pagan practices of their neighbors.

After the death of Jesus Christ, the institution of the spiritual Body of Christ, and the giving of the Holy Spirit, the Church, for the first time, was being opened up for Gentiles to become spiritual Israelites. It wasn't an opportunity for Gentiles to become God's special people as Gentiles. It was an open door for those who were not physical Israelites to become spiritual Israelites through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

". . . God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." This was the way that God opened Peter's understanding to the fact that He was the one calling Cornelius. He was the one who was calling the entire household of Cornelius, and Peter didn't need to worry about ministering to them and having association or fellowship with them at all. This was the will of God. God was opening the door to call Gentiles and make them a part of spiritual Israel.

Verses 34–35:

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

That was the meaning, brethren, of the vision. It had nothing to do with the repudiation of the health laws found in the Old Testament. The Church has always understood the meaning of that vision as having nothing to do with changing God's health laws.

Acts 11:18, just to complete it:

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Let's look at the next one now. We will call this one the topic of "meat sacrificed to idols." This is one that is very often quoted as justification to eat anything we want.

1 Corinthians 10:25–33:

"Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake . . ." *See, here, another certification by Paul that all of those Old Testament health laws don't apply to Christians today. Whatever is on sale in the store, you can just buy it. You don't have to worry about it because it is all good food.* Is that what Paul was saying?

Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.

So, this means, if we go over to someone's house and they put a big pork roast on the table, go ahead and dig in. Don't have a single worry about it for conscience sake. There are actually, believe it or not, former ministers of our parent affiliation who do that exact thing. This is exactly how they interpret it. Even those who knew and understood the applicability of those health laws now take license to eat anything, in given circumstances, and they call upon this very scripture as their justification to do so. Is that what Paul is talking about here?

". . . whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake." Is Paul saying that the health laws are now done away? Actually, the issue is not clean and unclean meats at all. Just as we found that the other two examples we went through had nothing to do with the issue of clean and unclean meats, neither does this one.

It has to do with meat offered to pagan idols in their worship ceremonies. We are not talking about being able to take a pork roast and eat it with good conscience. We are talking about a clean beast—an animal that God set aside as being clean—which was used in a pagan ritual as a sacrifice, and then afterwards, put on the open market for sale.

The converted Gentiles in the first-century Church—those who had been raised in those pagan philosophies—were called out of that way of life into Christianity for the first time. It makes sense that there would be great sensitivities to having any kind of entanglements with their previous pagan way of life.

Are there certain things from before the time you were converted that are very sensitizing to you because they were things you practiced at a time when you were absolutely separated from God? You had no affinity for God. You were blinded to Him altogether. I'm sure if you think hard enough, you can think of something that you associate with that time of your deception and separation from God. It is especially heinous to you now, because you associate it with that time before you had your mind opened to the Truth. That is exactly the principle that we are dealing with here concerning those Gentiles who were called into the Church. By purchasing meat that might have been offered in one of these pagan worship services which used to have a significant meaning to these called individuals, it still gave them a problem of conscience to have anything to do with it.

But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof . . .

Paul is teaching the principle that we are to be considerate and understanding of those who are weak because of their backgrounds and the orientation from which they have been called out. We all may have certain sensitivities. We are not to be blind, hard or indifferent to those things when they come to our attention. Part of the requirement for us to sacrifice, to show mercy, consideration and love for one another, is that we don't antagonize or put pressure on individuals. Those are things that an individual has to come to on their own in the time that God works with them.

. . . if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake . . .

What if you are sitting at a table alongside somebody, in this scenario that Paul is speaking of? You know that there is a nice steak before you, and you don't have a single problem with it. You know it doesn't matter whether or not that meat had been offered on a temple altar of some kind. You know it has nothing to do with God's approval of your being able to eat that meat. The idol means nothing to you; you don't have a hang-up about it at all. Yet, your spiritual brother in Christ, who came out of that way of life and those pagan rituals himself, leans over and whispers to you, "I think that was offered to an idol; I wouldn't eat it."

What is Paul saying? Are you to turn around and say, "Oh, you need to get rid of that thinking; that was part of your old life. It doesn't mean anything. Trust me, I have been in the Church for many years"? Then, you go about and eat your steak.

What Paul is teaching here, as we are going to see, is that we have an obligation not just to obey God's laws, but also to show consideration for the weakness of our brothers and sisters. We should not antagonize them if they are in a weak state, or pressure them to do something that might violate their conscience.

. . . if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God . . .

The whole intent, brethren, is to say that it is not the issue of the cleanliness of the meat itself. According to God's law, you are very justified in eating that which is set before you at that given time. The problem is when you are dealing with the sensitivity of a brother or sister of the faith. We have an additional obligation that God places upon us to be considerate of that individual in their weak state.

. . . Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Our intent is not to run roughshod over those whom God has called into His Church. God has called us from all manner of backgrounds, cultures, circumstances, and experiences and has placed us within this Body; and we have an obligation to be sensitive one to another.

This certifies that Paul was not speaking about repudiating God's health laws. He is talking about a Christian responsibility to go above and beyond in dealing with the weaknesses of our brothers and sisters of the common faith.

Let's back up to 1 Corinthians 8:6 and notice an expansion of this principle.

1 Corinthians 8:6–13:

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. 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.

This has to do with the weakness of the conscience of an individual. It has nothing to do with the approval of God according to His commandments, but it is what you might call a particular hang-up that somebody brings in with them that needs to be considered.

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 meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

Again, those grasping at straws in order to justify themselves attempt to use this as a way to say, "See, God says it doesn't matter what kind of meat it is. The meat is nothing, one way or another, so eat your pork roast, lizard, frog legs, lobster, clams, scallops, mussels and oysters. Eat whatever you want; God says it is nothing, one way or another." Is that what He is saying? They are missing the whole point.

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. [Remember, we are talking about meat offered to idols—not clean and unclean meats.] For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols . . .

Have you ever had one of those circumstances, brethren, where, at a particular time, you thought something was wrong or against God's law, and then because of whatever reason or pressure, you went ahead and did it; but it really bothered your conscience? Maybe later on, you found out that it wasn't wrong after all. You thought you were breaking God's law, but you actually weren't. You know what? If you have ever had that experience, in God's eyes you were breaking His law because you thought you were doing something wrong. Even if it turns out that it wasn't a violation of God's law, but because you, in conscience, felt it was wrong, it becomes wrong to you. Going against that which you felt was right at the time, is a principle that puts you at odds with God.

Each one of us might have certain things that have become important or compelling to us from our background or orientation in life, but they may not be a requirement of God whatsoever. Why else would Paul call it a weak brother; isn't that what we are dealing with? We are dealing with something that has nothing to do with God's laws, and certainly not with His health laws, but has everything to do with the orientation of mind of the individual who is involved. If that individual is called weak because they do not understand the true intent of God yet, we, as brothers and sisters, are not to try and cram that down their throat. You may actually do more harm than good.

At the same time, the responsibility of every Christian is to overcome our weaknesses, is it not? In whatever we may each be dealing with as weaknesses of the flesh, including certain concepts, thoughts of mind, and orientation, God wants us to deal with those things and become strong. In this case, hopefully this weak brother that Paul was speaking of who had a sensitivity to meat sacrificed to idols, should in

time, with more conversion, overcome that problem—or else there would be no growth. He would continue to be weak, would he not?

The point of what Paul is emphasizing here is that it is not for you or I to be the one to try to push and force that growth. God is the one who works with each individual in overcoming and strengthening. We do not mandate or force spiritual growth in the lives of any human being. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of each one of the members of the Church. Our responsibility is to be very sensitive and understanding. We all have sensitivities. Yours are different than mine, but we are all overcoming certain orientations of mind and heart. We are to be sensitive one to another so that we do not give Satan license to destroy us as a Body.

For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? [Is that what Christ wants? Not at all.] But when ye sin so against the brethren . . .

See, that becomes sin to us. It doesn't matter that we are actually doing something technically approved of by God, like eating a steak that might have been offered in an idol's temple. It doesn't matter. If we are being insensitive to somebody that Christ has called, then that becomes sin to us.

But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Paul is setting the example that he is willing to go the ultimate mile in order to support and help those who are weak while they are in the process of becoming stronger in the faith. It has nothing to do with the concept of overturning the health laws and that which God intended concerning clean and unclean meats.

Next, let's look at 1 Timothy 4:1. This is another one that you will have heard many times as a justification for doing away with God's health laws.

1 Timothy 4:1–5:

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 [more accurately translated "hindering marriage"], 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 . . .

As long as we offer a prayer before we eat it, we can eat anything we want, and God is going to make it good, healthy and clean for our bodies. That is what we are led to believe by those who want to justify that Christians are not under the obligation to abide by Leviticus 11. Is that what Paul is saying to Timothy here?

For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused [Notice the big condition, the biggest little word in the dictionary—if.], if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

What is it that sanctifies anything we eat? First, the Word of God. Now, tell me, where in the Word of God was all manner of beasts, fowl and creeping things approved? Where were the original laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 repudiated, amended or changed in the Word of God? You are not going to find it because they weren't. What is it that sanctifies meat as being clean to eat? It is the Word of God, and that means Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. It is sanctified by God's commanded laws concerning clean and unclean meats—and prayer.

We offer a prayer because of the example in the Bible, as we will see in a moment. We ask God to remove any impurities from that food that may be harmful. First and foremost, we are to be setting before ourselves only those things that God has approved for us to eat. Then, in case there is some contamination that may be harmful that we can't see, by asking God to make it nourishing and healthful for our bodies, we are asking for His miraculous intervention to make sure that the good food that He designed to be fuel for these bodies is actually taken and used by our bodies in that exact way. This is not an authorization for us to begin to eat anything that we want as long as we offer a prayer over it. Not at all. Do we really think that God is going to change the chemical composition of poisonous fuel in order to make it good for the human body? Does that make any sense at all?

It is sanctified by the Word of God first—the very health laws that God enumerated in the Old Testament—and prayer. The context is not the approval of unclean meats whatsoever, but the condemnation of those who have added to the law by teaching against eating the things that God did approve. That is what Paul is addressing to Timothy here. This is speaking of those who were involved in the corruption of the Truth—somebody who had that knowledge. We are not talking about people who were uncalled. We understand that this is a prophecy of the very last-day Church. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith . . ." Somebody is going to give up that Truth that they originally accepted, that which God revealed—the knowledge that they possessed and held as a pearl of great price. At some point, they repudiated that very way.

. . . giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of [demons]; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; [Hindering marriage] . . .

Is that not exactly what happened in our former affiliation—the corruption of the doctrine of divorce and remarriage? I can't think of anything else that can be called a hindrance to God's laws of marriage than that change of doctrine in 1975.

. . . [Hindering marriage], and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving . . .

What are we talking about? In all likelihood, vegetarianism—those who say that red meat is bad for you, that it is not good for these bodies at all. Just as the Pharisees and scribes were adding their ceremonial washings and rituals, here, we are talking about somebody who is adding to God's law by putting additional restrictions that God never intended whatsoever. They are saying that the good meat that God intended for us to eat is actually detrimental to our health; and so, we have a whole raft of vegetarians who won't touch any form of chicken, beef or any of those things that God said were good, because they know better. They have determined by their own research and study that they know better and that God—if they even believe in a God—never intended for us to eat meat, and that their human bodies, even according to their humanistic concepts, function much better and have better health and longevity of life if they do not eat meat at all.

That is what Paul is addressing here—someone who is adding to God's law and putting in additional restrictions. These were people in the Church. They, of all people, should know better; and yet, that is how they have corrupted the laws of God.

". . . commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving . . ." What meats did God create to be received with thanksgiving? Go back to Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14; that is where you find the list of those things that God consecrated. There is no indication here that Paul is expanding the rules of clean meats beyond that which God gave already in the Old Testament. ". . . which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving . . ." That is the condition. What did God command to be received with thanksgiving?

. . . of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good [meaning, those He set apart for human consumption according to His perfect law], and nothing to be refused . . .

Don't let anyone tell you that eating red meat is wrong. Now, as I mentioned before, the way man has perverted the raising of beef has made it very detrimental for our human bodies. You have to go out of your way to find good meat that has been raised properly without the antibiotics and growth hormones, and not raised in the feedlots where they've been fed things which cause the meat to be impure and actually carcinogenic to our systems. So, yes, most of the beef that you buy off the store shelf is probably unfit as food, but that is not the way God designed it. We can get good meats; we just have to work a little harder to find those that have been raised properly. You might have to spend a little bit more for it. I will get into more of that in the next sermon.

. . . 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.

I can't help but mention this because when I read this scripture now, I laugh. I laugh in one way, and it is very sad in another. I heard a portion of a sermon given by someone who used to be with us, and he was attempting to apply this last-day prophecy in verse 3 to us. "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats . . ." They interpret that as duck meat. We are commanding to abstain from eating duck which they consider to have been approved of God. So, we are fulfilling this last-day prophecy and showing that we are separated from God and apostate because they believe that God approved duck. Since we are teaching against duck, we are the ones who are commanding to abstain from meats which God said were good. They interpret this as, "commanding to abstain from duck meat which God hath created to be received on Thanksgiving Day." That is precisely the way this is being interpreted.

The fact that we do not believe in and avoid participating in a pagan holiday as the people who are totally cut off from God seek to worship the true God (and they don't know the true God) on the United States' proclaimed day of Thanksgiving, then we are fulfilling a prophecy here in the last days of an apostate group that has repudiated God's law. "Commanding to abstain from duck meat which God hath created to be received on the United States' Thanksgiving Day." If you can, in good conscience, apply that scripture that way, then there is not much more I can do; but I think you are all a little more wise than that.

Last scripture this afternoon; let's turn to Acts 27:33. We do ask God's blessing upon our meals, and here is one example.

Acts 27:33:

And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat . . .

This may apply to actual meat or just food as general sustenance, which is how it can be interpreted from the Greek.

. . . for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all . . .

Here is a precedent of praying to God before a meal in a public setting with a group of those gathered around the table.

. . . and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

So, there is the example. It requires, first and foremost, brethren, that we respect and value the things that God has given to us—those laws which guide and tell us how to take care of these human bodies and how to receive the benefits and blessings that God intended for us to have in the flesh. All we have to do is be submissive to Him and abide by those principles that He has revealed. We thank God for those good things that He has given to us—the variety of foods that He did give to

us as being clean and nourishing for these bodies. We ask Him, then, for His intervention to make those things of good use so that we may fulfill His will.

What is it that we ask God to bless, though? What is it that we set upon our tables at each meal and then ask God to bless? Are we putting non-food—poison—upon the table and asking God to bless it and make it nourishing for our health? That is one of the things, in conscience, that I have a hard time doing, brethren. I doubt very much that there are any of you who have a problem avoiding pork, seafood or other unclean things that God said not to eat—because you believe in the laws of God. However, I wonder how many other things you are setting upon your tables for your families to eat. How many things are you eating when you are away from home that are no better for you, and probably just as detrimental or more so, than the pork roast? How hypocritical is it for us to think that just because we don't eat pork, we can somehow eat all of these other things that are absolutely detrimental to our health, and God is just fine with it?

That is our topic for next time, brethren. That is when you are going to get the "sugar sermon." We will cover that, and a few other things, next time.