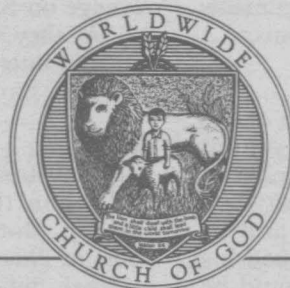


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The Worldwide News



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Personal from...

JOSEPH W. TKACH

Old Testament laws valid in intent, but changed in application

Jesus said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-18).

As long as there is earth and sky, all of the Bible will remain. Every command will remain as part of written Scripture. Not even one aspect will be erased. The commands especially must be taught and practiced (verses 19-20).

But we all know that the Law and the Prophets commanded physical circumcision and sacrifices. Yet these should *not* be taught as commands for the Church today. So how are we supposed to understand the words of Jesus?

Or, as another approach to the same problem, we might quote the words of Paul when he says that God's law is spiritual, holy, righteous and good (Romans 7:12, 14). Does this include laws about circumcision, sacrifices and other nonspiritual details? Why would God give laws that he would later declare obsolete? God is a perfect Lawgiver, so shouldn't we expect his law to remain the same forever? Why do we see changes from one part of God's Word to another?

The book of Hebrews, for example, declares that some biblical commands are obsolete. "The gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Hebrews 9:9-10). Galatians 3:19 also indicates that some God-given laws applied only until the coming of the Savior. These were the laws added 430 years after the promise was given to Abraham (verse 17).

How can it be that clear commands of the Old Testament, whether given to Abraham (Genesis 17:10-13) or to Moses, are not required today? One approach that explains this paradox is to understand that the laws are valid in their *intent*, but changed in their *application*.

Complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ

For example, the laws regarding sacrifice continue to be valid, but we obey them by having faith in the perfect and complete sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Sacrifices pictured the truth that the penalty of sin is death, and they were prophetic of a Savior who would give his life so that we might be forgiven.

Jesus fulfilled what the practices pictured, and our faith in him fulfills the intent behind the laws of sacrifice. In his death, Jesus confirmed the validity of the sacrificial laws, and he simultaneously rendered their physical performance unnecessary. The spiritual purpose of the sacrificial laws is eternally true, but the physical administration of the laws has changed.

When God commanded animal sacrifices, he commanded an administration of the law that was perfectly appropriate to the times. When David said that God did not want animal sacrifices (Psalm 51:16), that was also a perfectly appropriate administration of the law of sacrifice, because David was inspired to understand that contrition was the real command (verse 17).

When Christ sacrificed himself, he rendered all animal sacrifices unnecessary (Hebrews 10:8-10). The administration of the law shifted to *faith*—we are to believe in the effectiveness of Jesus' death to pay for our sinfulness. When we have faith in him, we are effectively obeying the intent of the laws regarding sacrifice.

Old covenant now obsolete

In a similar way, the ceremonial washings pictured eternal truths, but they were only a picture and not the reality that Christ fulfilled. "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on

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Cutbacks necessary, in light of priorities

By Paul Monteith

The Church announced cutbacks Feb. 9 that will affect personnel and operations at headquarters and personnel at Ambassador University in Texas.

"As a result of a decrease in income, we are regrettably forced to reduce the number of employees," said evangelist Joseph Tkach Jr., director of Church Administration.

At headquarters, terminations will occur in all departments, and affected employees will begin leaving Feb. 24. Many employees volunteered to leave, taking advantage of a voluntary separation package offered by the Church. The package provides one week's salary for each year in the Church's employ. In addition, Human Resources will help employees prepare and search for jobs (see article, page 12).

Ambassador University will terminate 30 full-time faculty and staff and nine part-time faculty and staff. The personnel cuts are the result of a reduction in AU's subsidy from the Church.

"This is a sad day for us," said Donald L. Ward, AU president. "We deeply appreciate the hard work and dedication of all our employees, losing anyone is hard. We will do as much as we can to ease the transition to new employment for those who have lost their jobs."

Pastor General Joseph W. Tkach said: "Many of those who are leaving

the Church's employment have expressed their deepest loyalties, and I know they are praying for the Church in earnest, even while they are suffering their own crises. I urge all members to pray for them and their families and to inform our Human Resources Department if they are aware of meaningful job opportunities our terminating employees may be able to fill."

International subsidies

The Church will realize further savings by reducing significantly its international subsidies. Most of the savings will be achieved by canceling the French, Italian, Norwegian and Spanish editions of *The Plain Truth*. Circulation of the U.S. edition will drop from 1.4 million to 1 million.

Mr. Tkach said that the Church plans to sell the headquarters facility in Pasadena and relocate headquarters to a smaller, more cost-efficient facility. This will significantly reduce the overhead needed to maintain the large Pasadena site.

The ministerial fleet program will be phased out over the next year. This will prevent a drain on the Church's reserves by avoiding a capital outlay of \$3 to \$4 million each year to purchase new vehicles.

As mentioned in the Feb. 7 *Worldwide News*, the concert series at Ambassador Auditorium will end in May as a result of the Performing Arts losing its subsidy from the Church.

WCG Travel will continue as the exclusive travel agency for the Church, but the plan is to establish it as an outside agency and also accept business from the public.

Priorities

A drop in income, presently at 21 percent below last year, "was expected after the new covenant understanding about tithing was explained to members in January," said Mr. Tkach Jr. "We are first and foremost the Church of God. As a Church, our first priority is to maintain the ministry and local congregations. We are also committed to the *Plain Truth* magazine and Ambassador University. These are the main priorities of the Church, and they will continue to receive the support needed to fulfill their mission."

Though the cutbacks might be seen in terms of a financial crisis, Mr. Tkach Jr. said the real story is a Church pursuing truth regardless of cost. "There are not many organizations that will knowingly invite hardship in order to stay faithful to their understanding of truth," he said. "The Church, despite its weaknesses and flaws, is committed, by the grace of God, to preaching the truth, regardless of cost."

TV ads for literature hit the spot

Five television spot ads airing throughout the United States in 12 television markets (a total of 34 stations), have generated more than 135,000 booklet requests. The ads aired between Jan. 2 and Feb. 12.

Three of the 60-second direct response ads, which produced successful viewer response in earlier tests, were used in this six-week flight. These ads offered one of the following: *The Bible—A Guided Tour*, *Inside the Book of Revelation* or *The Spirit World*.

In one of the markets, two other spot ads, *Who Was Jesus?* and *Will Christ Return?* were tested against *The Bible—A Guided Tour*.

The spot ads were produced by the Television Department.

Circumcision¹

Circumcision was an essential part of religious practice for the nation of Israel. Is circumcision a required practice for Christians today? This paper examines the biblical evidence and explores the validity of arguments concerning old covenant customs.

Abraham

In the first biblical mention of circumcision, God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. God said to Abram, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." God then explained his part of the covenant—he would be the God of Abraham's descendants and give them the land of Canaan (Genesis 17:1-8); God then further explained Abraham's part of the covenant (verses 10-14). "This is ... the covenant you are to keep." Every male was to be circumcised, and this physical rite was to be "the sign of the covenant" with God, and it was "an everlasting covenant."

Every male in Abraham's household was to be circumcised immediately, and from then on every new baby boy was to be circumcised on the eighth day. Whether they were Hebrews or whether they were purchased as slaves, the men had to be circumcised. If they were not, they would be cut off; they had broken the covenant.

Abraham did what God told him to

do (verses 23-27; 21:4). The practice of circumcision became the defining characteristic of the Abraham-Isaac-Jacob clan. Many years later, the sons of Jacob used this custom to get revenge on Shechem (Genesis 34:14-29). As they said, they could cohabit and intermarry only with people who were circumcised (verse 16).

Moses

The custom was probably continued when the Israelites lived in Goshen. But Moses, reared in the court of Pharaoh and later a refugee in Sinai, did not circumcise his own son. Zipporah had to do it (Exodus 4:24-25). Under the leadership of Moses, the entire nation of Israel did not circumcise their male infants in the wilderness. Joshua had to reinstate it (Joshua 5:2-8).

It is not clear why these lapses under Moses occurred, but it is clear that the omission had to be corrected before the plan of God proceeded. God could call Moses even when he was a covenant-breaker, but his son had to be circumcised before Moses could do his job. Nor would God allow the Israelites to live in the promised land unless they were faithful to the covenant God had made with Abraham.

Since circumcision was already a requirement for the Israelites, it is natural that it was included within the old covenant laws (Leviticus 12:2-3). Also, people had to be circumcised to participate in the Passover (Exodus 12:44, 48).² Even gentiles had to be circumcised if they wanted to worship God by means of this festival.

However, circumcision was not merely a physical and external practice. It symbolized something internal. God described idolatry and disobedience as a result of an uncircumcised heart (Leviticus 26:41); he described repentance as a circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6).

Of course, this spiritual meaning did not eliminate the need for the physical practice; the Israelites were to obey both the letter of the law and its symbolic meaning.

History and prophecy

The Israelites apparently faithfully continued the practice of circumcision. Even in the lawless period of the judges, the Israelites were distinguished from others by the fact that they were circumcised (Judges 14:3; 15:18; 1 Samuel 14:6; 17:26, 36; 31:4; 2 Samuel 1:20; 1 Chronicles 10:4).

When Samson and David called the Philistines "uncircumcised," it was not a mere medical description—it was an ethnic, earthy insult. It was probably impolite then, just as it is impolite today, to make references to someone's sexual organ. But this use of the term illustrates how definitive the practice of circumcision was for Israelite self-identity, and the depth of emotion involved in this ethnic tradition.

The prophets used the term "uncircumcised" as a synonym for gentiles (Isaiah 52:1). When Ezekiel predicted death for the ruler of Tyre and the Pharaoh of Egypt, he said they would die the death of the uncircumcised and be buried among the uncircumcised (Ezekiel 28:10; 31:18).

This conveyed not only a gentile death, but a death in opposition to God; the connotation was that these rulers were ungodly. This was developed further in Ezekiel's lament for Pharaoh in Ezekiel 32. In verses 19-32, Pharaoh was said to have his fate with other uncircumcised soldiers who are now buried. Throughout,

the implication is that they were all enemies of God.

Ezekiel criticized those who permitted uncircumcised people into the temple (Ezekiel 44:7). The prophets elaborated on the *spirit* of circumcision, too. Jeremiah exhorted his people, who presumably were already physically circumcised, to circumcise their hearts (Jeremiah 4:4). It was a metaphor for repentance. Indeed, God said he would punish both Israelites and gentiles who are circumcised in the flesh only and not in the heart (Jeremiah 9:25-26). Physical circumcision was not enough; spiritual circumcision was also necessary.

Isaiah emphasized the importance of circumcision in one of his prophecies of God's glorious rule. He predicted a time when only circumcised people would be allowed to enter the new city of Zion (Isaiah 52:1-2). In Isaiah's culture and time, that meant people who were physically circumcised.

Isaiah may have also meant those

We understand that circumcision is not required for gentiles. Perhaps we will better understand the significance of this decision if we try to argue the case for circumcision.

who were circumcised in heart as well. This was part of his prophecy of redemption (verse 3)—when good tidings of salvation are preached and God rules (verse 7), when the Lord returns to Zion (verse 8) and reveals salvation throughout the world (verse 10). Ezekiel also prophesied that only people who were circumcised in both the flesh and the heart could worship properly (Ezekiel 44:9).

Controversy in the early Church

The Law and the Prophets consistently upheld the need for circumcision, and the intertestamental period did, too. Circumcision was one of the Jewish customs forbidden by Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Maccabees 1:48). Hellenizers who tried to surgically reverse their circumcision were considered to have "abandoned the holy covenant" (verse 15).

Circumcision was so important to Jewish self-identity and worship that faithful Jews were willing to die rather than abandon this physical reminder that they were God's covenant people. The books of Maccabees record their eventual victory. Circumcision and other Jewish customs were enforced and were emphasized as religious obligations for Jewish people.

John the Baptist and Jesus were circumcised (Luke 1:59; 2:21). Jesus' only comment about circumcision was favorable: It was part of "the law of Moses," and the Jews were willing to circumcise children on the Sabbath. Since it was a religious rite, it could be done on the Sabbath, just as priests could "desecrate" the Sabbath to perform sacrifices (Matthew 12:5).

Stephen mentioned the covenant of circumcision that God had given Abraham (Acts 7:8), but he criticized the Sanhedrin for having uncircumcised hearts and ears (verse 51). They were physically circumcised, but not obedient to what God had told them through Jesus. Physical circumcision should have been fol-

lowed by a circumcision of the heart.

The biggest controversy about circumcision came when the gospel began going to gentiles. Circumcised believers (i.e., Jews) were astonished when the Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius (Acts 10:45). Circumcised believers criticized Peter for going to the house of an uncircumcised person and even eating with gentiles (Acts 11:2-3).

The problem surfaced again when more and more gentiles began responding to the gospel by believing in the Lord Jesus (verses 20-21). Later, some Jewish believers came to Antioch and taught that the gentiles had to be circumcised or else they could not be saved (Acts 15:1).

They also said that the gentiles should obey the entire law of Moses (verse 5). In Antioch, this would not have included sacrifices (unless they were to travel to Jerusalem), but it would have included other Jewish customs traceable to the five books of Moses. By "circumcision," these messianic Jews meant full proselyte status, since circumcision implied all the other laws (Galatians 5:3).

Argument of the Judaizers

The Jerusalem conference (Acts 15) concluded that circumcision was not required for gentile believers. They did not have to obey "the law of Moses." Today, we understand that circumcision is not required for gentiles, and we take it for granted. But perhaps we will better understand the significance of this decision if we try to argue the case for circumcision.

Luke does not report the actual arguments used by the Judaizers, but they could have made a strong case: "Circumcision goes back to God's eternal covenant with Abraham, in which God promised to be the God of his descendants. These gentiles are claiming Abraham as their spiritual father. He is the father of the faithful, and Genesis 17:12 tells us that *all* who are his descendants, whether physically or otherwise, fall under the covenant of circumcision. If they really have the faith that Abraham did, they will be willing to do what Abraham did. If they really have a covenant with the same God, they will gladly accept the sign of that covenant. The covenant was revealed as everlasting, not a temporary arrangement. It was commanded by God himself.

"God has called these people, and that is good. But just as our ancestor Israelites could not inherit the promises until they were circumcised, so also these gentiles cannot inherit the spiritual promises (salvation) unless they are circumcised. Until they are circumcised, they are strangers to the covenant of promise. We should not allow them to participate in the bread and wine with us until they are circumcised; even though they have believed in Jesus our Passover, they should not partake of the meal or receive the benefit of his sacrifice unless they are circumcised.

"There is solid scriptural precedent and support for this. The example of the ancient Israelites was written for our admonition. Circumcision is not only a physical command from God; it also has important spiritual symbolism. It pictures repentance, but this symbolism doesn't eliminate the need to obey God physically, too. In fact, if these people really were obedient to God, they would not want to spiritualize away God's command to be circumcised.

"Isaiah clearly said that when the good news of salvation is preached, See Circumcision, page 3

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Circumcision: rituals swept aside

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only circumcised people will be able to enter the daughter of Zion, which is the Church today. These gentiles are being grafted into Israel, and they therefore need to keep Israelite laws.

"What advantage is there in being circumcised? Much in every way! It is our nation that has the promises and covenants, and our Lord said that salvation is of the Jews. The only thing Jesus said about circumcision was positive. And he said that if something causes sin, we ought to cut it off. Circumcision helps us picture that important truth, but we lose its symbolic value if we abandon the practice.

"Circumcision has value if a person observes the law, and we certainly don't want to encourage these new converts to be lawbreakers. Our Messiah specifically said that he didn't come to do away with the law, and none of it would pass away. He fulfilled the symbolism of sacrifices, but that doesn't do away with our need to obey the plain and clear commands of God.

"God justifies people by faith, but the faith isn't genuine if these people aren't willing to obey clear commands of God in the God-breathed Scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation.

No one should rely on circumcision as a guarantee of salvation, of course, but neither should we reject it. Abraham believed first, and then he obeyed. That's what these gentiles need to do to be saved. Keeping God's commands is what counts."

Would we be able to answer such an argument without the writings of Paul? We'd have, of course, the conclusion of the Jerusalem conference, but then right after that we would read that Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3). Paul was accused of teaching against circumcision (Acts 21:21), but that was clearly a false accusation.

From Genesis to Acts, the Scriptures are supportive of the rite of circumcision except for one chapter. Although Acts 15 gives us the overall conclusion that circumcision is not required for gentiles, it does not answer all the specific arguments that the Judaizers could have had.

However, Peter, Barnabas and Paul radically reinterpreted the law of circumcision by keeping the spiritual meaning but rejecting the physical rite. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they explained that Abraham received the promises by faith before circumcision; therefore the circumcision of the most-respected patriarch, although commanded as an everlasting covenant for his physical heirs and extended household, cannot be a requirement for salvation.

Why? Because Peter, Barnabas and Paul saw a dramatic discontinuity between the old and the new. Even a ritual confirming the promises, a ritual given hundreds of years before Sinai, could simply be swept aside, as a requirement for salvation, by the new situation that Jesus had inaugurated.

Few among us would have been so bold.

Many Jewish Christians could have been deeply troubled by the conclusion that circumcision was simply not required. An ancient and culturally important religious law was rejected without even a hint that Jesus was against it in any way. Why was this necessary?

Let us now see what Paul later wrote, and understand his rationale

for the discontinuity between old and new.

Circumcised in and by Jesus Christ

"Circumcision has value if you observe the law," Paul writes (Romans 2:25), but he does not explain what that value is. After all, if a person observes the law he is counted as circumcised (i.e., in Abraham's covenant) whether or not he is actually circumcised (verse 26). A gentile who obeys is better than a Jew who disobeys (verse 27); mere circumcision cannot guarantee salvation.

If a person is Jewish only externally, in physical circumcision, but not in the heart, such a person is not one of God's people, since real circumcision is not "merely" physical (verse 28). Paul's comments so far would be agreeable to a messianic Judaizer who advocated that both physical and spiritual circumcision were necessary. But Paul's next comment would be too sweeping: A man is one of God's people if he is inwardly circumcised, since the real circumcision is a spiritual matter, of the heart, "not by the written code" (verse 29).

But what value is there in being circumcised? Or, in synonymous terms, what advantage is there in being a Jew? Much, replies Paul (Romans 3:1-2). He does not extol any health benefits, but he mentions that circumcised people have in their community the words of God (verse 2). That is a great value, but it is all for naught if they do not obey—and that brings Paul to the crux of the problem.

There is none righteous, no not one. No one keeps the law perfectly; we all fall short. How then can we be saved? By faith. "There is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (verse 30). Justification by faith is the central reason that the physical rite of circumcision is no longer necessary.

Paul examines the example of Abraham again, and notes that Abraham was accounted righteous even while he was uncircumcised (Romans 4:9-10). Even though he later received a physical sign or seal of his righteousness, his righteous status before God did not depend on circumcision (verse 11). He is the father of all who faithfully live as he did before he was circumcised (verse 12)—and that was an exemplary faith, since Abraham packed up and moved without knowing where he was going.

To the Corinthians, Paul made it clear that if a person was called while uncircumcised, he should not attempt to change his anatomy (1 Corinthians 7:18). And his reason is surprising: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts" (verse 19). The surprise is that circumcision *had been* one of God's commands, and yet it doesn't count. The law of circumcision was a religious rite that had nothing to do with our moral responsibilities to our neighbors.

Paul explained circumcision in greatest detail in his letter to the Galatians. They were being misled by a Judaizing heresy that demanded that gentile believers follow up their faith with physical compliance with old covenant commands. But Paul explained that it is wrong to view physical circumcision as *necessary* because that would imply that faith in Christ was not enough. "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Galatians 5:2).

Paul himself did not forbid circumcision; we have already noted that he

circumcised Timothy, whose mother was Jewish. But he explains that Titus, a gentile, was not circumcised (Galatians 2:3). It was not a requirement for salvation, nor a requirement for leadership within the Church. Circumcision is permissible as a voluntary practice, but it should not be taught as a requirement. It does not enhance anyone's standing before God. It should not be done as a commitment to old covenant laws, which was the issue in Acts 15 and Galatians 5:2-3.

Circumcision was only the beginning of the messianic Judaizers' demands. What they were really insisting on was the whole law of Moses as a requirement (Galatians 5:3). They were insisting on the Mosaic covenant. Faith in Christ is great, they probably said, but we have to add to our faith some works as specified by the authoritative writings of

Physical circumcision, once commanded by God, is no longer required. How can this be? God, the perfect and unchangeable Lawgiver, changed a fundamental aspect of his law.

Moses. Not so, said Paul. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (verse 6).

Paul had to state that he was *not* preaching circumcision (verse 11). Why was this necessary? Probably because the messianic Judaizers were making the claim that Paul was actually in favor of circumcision. Like other Jewish preachers seeking proselytes, Paul taught morals and virtues. Once people had accepted the morals, the Judaizers claimed, Paul would add circumcision as the capstone requirement. Not so, said Paul. He was not going to add requirements to what he had already taught the Galatian believers.

He was so vehement about the Judaistic agitators that he exclaimed, "I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (verse 12). Moreover, if the Galatians submitted to this work of the law, as if it were required, they could not be saved (verse 2)!

The Judaizers, he said, had selfish motives. They wanted to look good by bringing in converts for messianic Judaism, and they didn't want to be criticized by fellow Jews regarding the shameful death of Jesus (Galatians 6:12). They talked about obedience, but they themselves were sinning and in need of the cross they were ashamed of (verse 13). Circumcision is obsolete, Paul said, since it has been replaced by the cross of Christ and all that the cross symbolizes (verse 14). Through faith in our Savior's death on our behalf, we are acceptable to God on the basis of faith, and we do not need a physical sign of the covenant we have in Jesus' blood.

"Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" (verse 15). If we are born anew in Christ, if we have faith that works itself out in love, then we are acceptable to God. We do not have to observe this ancient rite in order to be saved.

Because the gentiles were uncircumcised, they were once considered excluded from the covenants of promise and cut off from God. But now, through the blood of Christ, they have been brought near to God (Ephesians 2:11-13). In Jesus' own flesh, by his own obedience to old covenant rules, he has abolished the commandments and regulations that had separated Jews from gentiles (verses 14-15). He gave all ethnic groups access to God and made them fellow citizens with each other; it is in Christ that we are being built together as a spiritual temple for God (verses 19-22).

Paul also warned the Philippians about the circumcision advocates. "Watch out for those dogs," he said, using Jewish slang for gentiles in reference to the Judaizers (Philippians 3:2). They are evil men, "mutilators of the flesh"—a Greek view of the rite of circumcision.

But the Spirit wars against the flesh; Paul emphasizes that the physical rite, at least to the Greek mind, takes away from its spiritual meaning. It is *believers* who are the true circumcision—all "who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh" (verse 3). Paul himself was circumcised (verse 5), but he counted it as loss for the sake of Christ (verses 7-8). His righteousness did not come from the law, but from faith in Christ (verse 9). Justification by faith has rendered the rite of circumcision obsolete.

The principle of salvation by faith, which Abraham received before his circumcision, gave Paul the logical foundation for saying that obedience to a clear command of Scripture was not necessary for salvation. A physical requirement cannot supersede a promise of God given through faith.

Paul told his gentile converts in Colosse that they were circumcised in Christ (Colossians 2:11). Since he is our righteousness, and we are in him, we have been given fullness in him (verse 10). We can be accounted righteous because he himself is righteous. Therefore we are as good as circumcised if we are putting off our sinful nature—if we have repented and have begun to live holy lives.

Our circumcision is therefore not done by humans, but by Christ himself. How so? Through baptism (verse 12). That is how we express publicly that we have faith in Jesus as our Savior, that our old life is ended, that we—now circumcised in the heart—intend to live from then on in his service and that we have faith that we will live again with him.

When we were separated from God in our sinful nature, we were spiritually uncircumcised. But God has now made us alive again with Christ (verse 13). He forgave our sins, canceling our spiritual debts (incurred through transgressing the written code that was against us), including the regulations that concerned the symbolic forgiveness of sins (verse 14). He likewise canceled the regulation of circumcision, which symbolized repentance and sanctification. Since the fullness of those regulations has come, the symbol is no longer required. Christ has given us the fulfillment.

The eternal validity of God's law

The conclusion is clear: Physical circumcision, which was once commanded by God, is no longer required. How can this be? God, the perfect and unchangeable Lawgiver, changed a fundamental aspect of his law—not only circumcision, but also sacrifices and temples and priest-

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Circumcision: law behind the law

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hoods. The infallible Scriptures contain commands that are obsolete.

But didn't Jesus say: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17-18).

Jesus was talking about the entire Old Testament—the Law and the Prophets. So how can his statement be reconciled with the fact that some commands of the Old Testament are not required today? Perhaps the best approach to explain this is to understand that the laws are valid in their

intent, but changed in their application. Laws regarding sacrifice continue to be valid, but we actually obey them through faith in Jesus Christ, who was sacrificed for us. The law required sacrifice, and Jesus confirmed its validity at the same times as he made it unnecessary for us to perform it.³

When God commanded animal sacrifices, he commanded an administration of the law that was perfectly appropriate to the times. When David said that God did not want animals (Psalm 51:16), that was also a perfectly appropriate administration of the law of sacrifice, because David was inspired to understand that contrition was the real command (verse 17). When Christ sacrificed himself, he rendered all animal sacrifices unnecessary (Hebrews 10:8-10). The administration of the law shifted to faith in the efficacy of Jesus to atone for our

sinfulness. When we have faith in him, we are effectively obeying the laws regarding sacrifice.

Likewise, we are obeying the law of circumcision when our attitudes are circumcised. The real law—allegiance to God—is eternally valid; the physical administration of it has changed. We live in a different age, needing a different administration.

God's law is to be written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This does not mean the physical details regulating specifics of worship practices, but it means the intent behind those regulations, especially faith and love and other fruits of the Spirit.

God's law did not originate with Moses—since sin existed before Moses and sin does not exist without law, law existed before Moses (Romans 5:12-14). God's law existed, and the people transgressed it. God's

law does not depend on its Mosaic administration. There is a law *behind* the law of Moses. The Mosaic administration was a valid expression of God's holy, spiritual, righteous law, and it was perfectly appropriate for its situation, but it is not appropriate after the death of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, to impose or to attempt to combine the Mosaic administration into Christian faith and practice can cause many problems. New wine makes old wineskins burst (Matthew 9:17). The old covenant is obsolete. However, many of the Mosaic rules, especially those concerning the way we should treat other people, are still valid applications of the spiritual purpose. Jesus explained them in the Sermon on the Mount, for example.⁴

But many other laws of Moses, especially those concerning worship, are not valid practices because we have been given the spiritual fulfillment that those rites only symbolized. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for paying too much attention to those rules and not enough on human relationships (e.g., Matthew 23; Mark 7:11-13).

In summary, laws can remain on the books, and remain valid in purpose, and yet we may no longer be required to keep them in the letter. A simple citation of Matthew 5:17 does not automatically prove that an Old Testament law must be administered in the way it was under Moses. The law of circumcision illustrates the new covenant approach to old covenant laws.

2 Since the Israelites did not practice circumcision in the wilderness (Joshua 5:5), and uncircumcised people could not partake of the Passover, only the generations that left Egypt kept the Passover. There may not have been enough lambs in the desert to keep an annual slaughter for the whole congregation (Numbers 11:13).

3 "The law" was a comprehensive term for the total divine revelation of the Old Testament. None of it will pass away or be discarded, he says, not a single letter or part of a letter, until it has all been fulfilled.... The law is as enduring as the universe....

"The law and the prophets," namely the Old Testament, contain various kinds of teaching. The relation of Jesus Christ to these differs, but the word 'fulfillment' covers them all.... Jesus 'fulfilled' it all in the sense of bringing it to completion by his person, his teaching and his work....

"The whole ceremonial system of the Old Testament, both priesthood and sacrifice, found its perfect fulfillment. Then the ceremonies ceased. Yet, as Calvin rightly comments, 'It was only the use of them that was abolished, for their meaning was more fully confirmed.' They were but a 'shadow' of what was to come; the 'substance' belonged to Christ" (John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7): *Christian Counter-Culture*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1978, 1985, pages 71, 73).

4 "The Old Testament contains ethical precepts or the moral law of God.... Jesus fulfilled them in the first instance by obeying them.... He does more than obey them himself; he explains what obedience will involve for his disciples. He rejects the superficial interpretation of the law given by the scribes; he himself supplies the true interpretation.

His purpose is not to change the law, still less to annul it, but 'to reveal the full depth of meaning that it was intended to hold'....

"Christian righteousness is greater than pharisaic righteousness because it is deeper, being a righteousness of the heart....

"The scribes and Pharisees ... were trying to reduce the challenge of the law, to 'relax' the [ethical] commandments of God, and so make his moral demands more manageable and less exacting.... They made the law's demands less demanding and the law's permissions more permissive. [They did this for laws about interpersonal conduct, but they had the opposite approach regarding the Sabbath!] What Jesus did was to reverse both tendencies.

"He insisted instead that the full implications of God's commandments must be accepted without imposing any artificial limits" (Stott, pages 72, 75, 79).

Tithing¹

Is tithing required in the new covenant? Does the Bible tell us to pay at least 10 percent of our incomes to the Church, save 10 percent for festival expenses and give 10 percent as personal charity in some years?

This paper examines the biblical evidence.

Abraham and Jacob

The first biblical mention of tithing is in Genesis 14. After four Mesopotamian kings had taken Lot captive, Abraham attacked them and recovered all the booty. After his victory, the king of Sodom came out to meet him, and so did Melchizedek, a priest of God. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and then Abraham "gave him a tenth of everything" (Genesis 14:20).

Perhaps Abraham tithed to Melchizedek regularly, or perhaps not. The text simply does not say. There is nothing here to indicate that Abraham normally gave Melchizedek anything, or that he even knew him before this, or that tithing was required on war booty. But the text does show that Abraham was generous. He even gave the remaining share of his booty to the king of Sodom (verses 23-24).

Didn't Abraham keep *all* of God's laws (Genesis 26:5), and wasn't tithing one of the laws that the readers of Genesis would have understood was kept? If they understood it that way, they were mistaken. This verse says that Abraham kept God's

requirements, commands, decrees and laws—but many of God's decrees and requirements were built around the nation of Israel and the Levitical priesthood and tabernacle. Abraham could not have kept such decrees and laws.

What Abraham kept were all the laws that were relevant in his day. Whether that included tithing is

During the old covenant, Levitical system, tithing funded Israel's worship requirements. Farmers tithed on their produce, and herdsmen gave firstlings or tithes, as appropriate.

another question, and it cannot be answered simply by quoting Genesis 26:5. Whether tithing was required in Abraham's day cannot be proven from this verse. Nor could it be disproved—but we cannot argue from silence to make requirements for God's people today.

The next mention of tithing is in Genesis 28:20-22. Jacob, while on his way to Mesopotamia, had a miraculous dream at Bethel. In the morning, Jacob vowed, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food

to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

It does not appear that Jacob was in the habit of tithing. Nor did he have much faith at this point. He wanted protection, and it wouldn't be much of a vow to say, I will do the minimum of what is already required only after you have done all these things for me. Rather, Jacob was volunteering for what was for him an extra sacrifice—something out of the ordinary.

Firstlings

The first command for tithing comes in Leviticus 27:30-33, but that is not the first payment that God required of the Israelites. Commands about tithing generally concern grain, wine and oil, and the Israelites in the wilderness didn't yet have any such produce, nor did they need to tithe on the manna they gathered.

But they did have livestock. Tithing was required on some animals, as mentioned below, but a different system of payment was also instituted for animals. Our study of tithing includes this other system.

In the last plague on Egypt, God killed the firstborn male of every animal and human, but he spared the Israelites and their animals. Therefore, God claimed ownership of every Israelite firstborn and firstling male animal (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:13). Clean animals were to be sacrificed; unclean animals and humans were to be redeemed (Exodus 13:12-15; 34:19-20). No one could make the

firstborn animal a special offering, because it already belonged to the Lord (Leviticus 27:26).

For the generation that left Egypt, however, God made a grand substitution: Instead of the firstborn male of each family and flock, God accepted the tribe of Levi and all its animals (Numbers 3:40-50; 8:16-18).

That took care of the past, but God continued to require that all firstborn male animals should be given to the priests (Numbers 18:15-17). The firstborn males of humans and unclean animals were redeemed, but clean animals belonged to the Lord. They were holy and were given to the priests (Numbers 18:15), sacrificed and eaten by both priests and people during the festivals (Deuteronomy 15:19-20; 12:6, 17; 14:23). This continued to be the law in Nehemiah's day (Nehemiah 10:36) and in Jesus' day (Luke 2:23).

However, tithing was also required on "every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod" (Leviticus 27:32). Was this in *addition* to the firstlings, or was it *instead* of firstlings? It is difficult for us to know exactly how these laws would be administered, and, of course, it is not necessary for Christians to take a position on these details.

Tithes

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD" (Leviticus 27:30).³ In addition to these tithes, the people also gave firstfruits of their harvest (Exodus 23:19; 34:26;

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Leviticus 2:14), but these firstfruits do not seem to be a fixed percentage.

All the tithes and firstfruits belonged to God, and he gave them to the Levites for their use (Numbers 18:12-13, 21, 24). The Levites could keep 90 percent of what they were given, but had to give 10 percent as an offering (verses 26-32).

Tithing, firstfruits and firstlings were given in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 31:5-6) and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 10:35-39; 12:44). Tithes and animal sacrifices were required in the days of Malachi (Malachi 3:8-10), and tithes were required in Jesus' day (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). In Malachi's day, tithing was still required, and physical blessings were promised for obedience, just as physical blessings were promised for obedience to the old covenant.

During the old covenant, Levitical system, tithing funded Israel's worship requirements. Farmers tithed on their produce, and herdsmen gave firstlings or tithes, as appropriate. The Bible does not tell us whether or how potters, carpenters, merchants, etc. calculated tithes.

Festival tithe

The tithes were given to the Levites. Therefore, when Deuteronomy 12 and 14 tell us that the people were to eat their tithes during festivals, we concluded that Deuteronomy is talking about an additional tithe, a festival tithe.⁴

"You are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.... You are to eat them in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose—you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns—and you are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to. Be careful not to neglect the Levites as long as you live in your land" (Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 17-19).

Deuteronomy 14:23 says it again: "Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name."

The traditional interpretation is that the festival tithe is a "second" tithe.⁵ The Levites needed a tithe so they could serve in the tabernacle, and the people needed a tithe for the festivals, since the festivals constituted about 5 percent of the year, plus travel time.

A third tithe?

At the end of every three years of farming, the Israelites were told to "bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you" (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). Deuteronomy 26:12-15 mentions a tithe for similar use.

Is this an additional tithe or an alternative use of the other tithe? This was a controversy among the rabbis. Tobit, Josephus and Jubilees give evidence for three tithes. The Mishnah, however, combines the festival tithe

and the poor tithe: the second tithe being used for the festival in years 1, 2, 4 and 5, and being used for the poor in years 3 and 6 out of the seven-year farming cycle.⁶

Would this mean that farmers didn't observe the festivals in years 3 and 6? Perhaps. They wouldn't pay any tithes at all in year 7, since the land was not tilled. Therefore, they may not have been able to go to every festival in every year—or perhaps the festival tithe was simply saved from year to year to pay for festival observance in years in which no festival tithe was saved.

There is no easy proof whether the tithe for the poor replaced or was in addition to other tithes. Evidence in favor of the latter is that Deuteronomy 14:28-29 does not mention any firstlings or other offerings. This suggests that it is not in the same category as the other tithes, but was an additional tithe, which is the way we have traditionally understood it.

Tithing in the New Covenant

Now let us consider whether tithing is required in the new covenant. Tithing is mentioned in only three or four places in the New Testament. Jesus acknowledged that the Pharisees were very careful about tithing. In one place, he cited this practice in association with Pharisaic self-righteousness (Luke 18:12).

On another occasion, Jesus said that tithing is something that the Pharisees should not leave undone (Matthew 23:23; parallel in Luke 11:42). Tithing was still in force before Jesus' death. The Levitical priesthood needed financial support. Despite Jesus' favorable comment about tithing, however, it is in a context of criticizing Pharisaic priorities. The Pharisees were wrong to consider tithing more important than mercy, love, justice and faithfulness.

The only other New Testament mention of tithing is in Hebrews 7, and again the context is that of old practices. The fact that Abraham was blessed by and paid tithes to Melchizedek illustrates the superiority of Melchizedek and Christ over the Levitical priesthood (verses 1-10).

The author then goes on to note that "when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law" (verse 12). This is not merely a change in tithing law, although it includes tithing—it involves the entire old covenant, which is the law code that assigned tithes to the Levites. That law was changed.

How much has been changed? It is not just a matter of who receives the tithes, but the entire old covenant, with its commands, is obsolete. As verses 18-19 say, "The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect)." These verses are discussing the same law as verse 12 is—the entire old covenant has been set aside.

But it is still a valid principle that humans ought to honor God by returning some of the blessings he gives them. The only place that a percentage is commanded is within the old covenant. There is good precedent for tithing before Sinai, but no proof that it was required. And without proof, we cannot bind requirements on God's people. We can point to Abraham's good example, but we cannot make it a requirement when the Bible does not authorize us to.

Needs in the New Covenant ministry

However, there continues to be a financial need within the new

covenant, and there continues to be a financial obligation on the part of all Christians. Paul describes himself as a minister of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6), which has much greater glory than the old (verse 8). Because Paul was being transformed into the Lord's glory, he had confidence (3:18-4:1). He was willing to endure hardship and persecution because he was confident that he would be raised with Jesus (2 Corinthians 4). This present life is temporary, but the heavenly life will be forever; therefore he was confident (5:1-6).

Because of what Christ had done for him in the new covenant, Christ's love compelled Paul to preach his gospel, the message of reconciliation (5:11-21). Paul then exhorted the Corinthians "not to receive God's grace in vain" (6:1). How were they doing this? Paul explains the troubles he had endured to serve the people (6:3-10). He had gone out of his way to show love to them, but they were withholding their affections from him (6:12). He then asked for a fair exchange, for them to open their hearts to him (6:13).

Paul admonished the Corinthians that they had a duty to give something in response to what they had

Because of what Christ had done for Paul in the new covenant, Christ's love compelled him to preach the gospel, the message of reconciliation. Paul then exhorted the Corinthians 'not to receive God's grace in vain.'

been given. This response comes in terms of morality (6:14-7:1), which the Corinthians had done (7:8-13), and in terms of affection, which the Corinthians had also done (7:2-7), and in financial generosity, which Paul addresses in chapter 8. This is the way in which the Corinthians had closed their hearts to Paul and withheld their affections.

Paul cited the example of the Macedonian churches, who gave generously, even to the point of self-sacrifice (8:1-5). The example is powerful; the implications are strong that the Corinthians needed to respond to Paul's sacrifices by making sacrifices themselves. But Paul did not make a command (8:8). Instead, he asked first for a turning of the heart. He wanted the Corinthians to give themselves to the Lord first, and then to support Paul. He wanted their gift to be done in sincere love, not from compulsion (8:5, 8). Paul then reminded them that Christ had become poor for their sakes; the implication is that the Corinthians should make financial sacrifices in return.

But then Paul reduced the pressure, reminding the Corinthians that they could not give more than they had (8:12). Nor did they have to impoverish themselves to enrich others; Paul was only aiming for equity (8:13-14). Paul again expressed confidence in their willingness to give, and added the peer pressure of the Macedonian example and the boasting he had done in Macedonia about the generosity of the Corinthians (8:24-9:5).

Then Paul balanced his appeal with the reminder that the offering must be done willingly, not from compulsion or given grudgingly (9:5, 7). He reminded them that God rewards generosity (9:6-11) and that a good example causes people to praise God and puts the gospel in a favorable setting (9:12-14).

This collection was *not* for Paul's own use. It was a collection for the poor in Judea. But Paul said nothing about "third" tithe assistance. Rather, he appealed to the new covenant environment: Christ had made many sacrifices for them, so they ought to be willing to make a few sacrifices for one another. The offering was not designed to support the preaching of the gospel. Actually, it was in lieu of ministerial support, a substitution instead of an addition. Paul had not asked for *any* financial support from Corinth (11:7-11; 12:13-16). Instead, he had been supported by Macedonians (11:9).

Paul had a right to be supported by the Corinthians, but he did not use it (1 Corinthians 9:3-15). This passage in Paul's first letter tells us more about our Christian duty to give financial support to the gospel. Workers should be able to receive benefits of their work (9:7). The old covenant even made provision for oxen to be given benefits of their work (9:9).

Throughout his appeal, Paul does not cite any laws of tithing and say that they applied to new covenant ministers.⁷ He does mention that priests received benefits from their work in the temple (9:13), but he does not cite any percentage. Their example is cited in the same way as the example of soldiers, vineyard workers, herdsmen, oxen, plowers and threshers.

It is simply a general principle. As Jesus said, "The worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7). Paul cited the oxen and wages scriptures again in 1 Timothy 5:17-18. Elders, especially those who preach and teach, should be honored financially as well as with respect.

Jesus also commanded, "those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14). This implies that those who believe must provide a living for those who preach. There is a financial duty, and there is a promised reward for generosity (though that reward may not necessarily be physical or financial).

A need to be generous

Christians are recipients of the riches of God's grace, and are to be generous and giving. Christians are called to a life of service, sharing and stewardship. We have an obligation to do good. When we give ourselves to the Lord, we will give generously to those who preach his message and we will share with his people who have needs.

"Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me," said Jesus to a rich man (Luke 18:22). He said the same thing to his disciples (12:33). The new covenant makes astonishing demands on us—it demands all that we have, and that is fair, since Jesus gave all he had for us. He praised a widow who put two coins into the temple treasury, because she gave "all she had" (21:2).

Wealth is often an enemy of faith. It can "choke" people and cause them to be spiritually unfruitful (8:14). "Woe to you who are rich," Jesus warned (6:24). He warned us about the dangers of greed (12:15) and warned

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Unclean¹

Among the regulations God gave the ancient Israelites were various laws about cleanness and uncleanness. These laws were not concerned with simple hygiene, but ceremonial status. People who were unclean were not allowed to participate in religious ceremonies. Are these laws relevant today? This paper examines the evidence in the five books of Moses and the New Testament.

We are familiar with the concept of clean and unclean animals, so we will discuss other sorts of uncleanness first. This may seem tedious and irrelevant, but it may help us better understand the Old Testament concept of uncleanness.

Religious purity

The word for "clean" (*tahôr*) may also be translated "pure," as we see in numerous places in Exodus. The tabernacle furniture and utensils had to be made with pure gold.

Jacob told his household to get rid of their idols and to "purify" themselves and change their clothes (Genesis 35:2). We are not told *how* they purified themselves, but it seems to have been related to worship. Later, Levites were purified with "the water of cleansing" (Numbers 8:6-7, 15, 21).

Portions of a sin offering had to be

incinerated outside the camp in a clean place (Leviticus 4:12). Ashes of the burnt offering had to be put in a clean place (Leviticus 6:11). The priests were to eat sacrificial meat in a clean place (Leviticus 10:14).

If priests performed an offering when they were unclean, they were to be expelled (Leviticus 22:3). They

Christians today have a relationship with God based on the covenant of faith and promise made with Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9). Faith leads us to worship and obey our Lord and Savior, but ceremonial laws are no longer required.

could eat the offerings only when they were clean (Leviticus 22:4-7; Numbers 18:11-13).

If something unclean touched meat of the fellowship offering, that meat would have to be incinerated (Leviticus 7:19). Only clean people could eat meat of the fellowship offering (Leviticus 7:19-21). If an unclean per-

son ate the meat, that person was to be expelled (Leviticus 7:20-21). However, unclean people could eat non-sacrificial meat (Deuteronomy 12:15, 21-22; 15:21-22).

In these passages, the distinction between cleanness and uncleanness was made for religious purposes, relating to the Levitical and sacrificial system of ancient Israel.

Sexual impurities

The Hebrew word for "unclean" (*tame'*) may also be translated "defiled," and this is how the New International Version (NIV) translates it in Genesis 34:5, 13, 27. When Shechem had sex with Dinah, she became defiled. A person who committed adultery or bestiality or homosexuality was defiled (Leviticus 18:20-23). Adultery was called impurity or defilement (Numbers 5:12-30). A woman who remarried was defiled, at least for her first husband (Deuteronomy 24:4). Witchcraft and child sacrifice would also defile a person (Leviticus 18:21; 19:31; 20:2-3).

Heinous sin was involved in these cases, but uncleanness in most cases did not come from what we would today call sin. For example, normal sexual intercourse rendered both man and woman unclean (Leviticus 15:18).

Childbirth made women unclean. For a boy baby, the mother was unclean for a week, and cleansed or purified 33 days later. For a girl

baby, the mother was unclean for two weeks, and purified 66 days later. In both cases, her purification ceremony involved a burnt offering and a sin offering (Leviticus 12:1-8).

Menstruation caused uncleanness for seven days, and whoever touched the woman's bed was unclean until evening (Leviticus 15:19-23). If a man slept with her during menstruation, he would also be unclean for seven days, and any bed he laid on would also be unclean (Leviticus 15:24).

An emission of semen caused uncleanness, whether it was during intercourse or a nocturnal emission (Leviticus 15:16-18; Deuteronomy 23:10). Unusual discharges, sexual or otherwise, caused a man or woman to be unclean (Leviticus 15:2-3, 25-27). If an unclean man touched anyone or spit on anyone, that person would be unclean until evening (Leviticus 15:7-8). If the unclean man touched a clay pot, the pot had to be broken (Leviticus 15:12). When the discharge finally stopped, the person could be cleansed after a week, with a sin offering and a burnt offering (15:13-15, 28-30).

Unclean things

A basic principle of uncleanness was its contagiousness: "Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening" (Numbers 19:22). If a person went into a quarantined house, he would be unclean (Leviticus 14:46). If a person touched an unclean bed, he would be unclean until evening (Leviticus 15:4-10). Even if a person *accidentally* touched anything that would make him unclean, he was "guilty." He had to confess his "sin" and make a sin offering (Leviticus 5:3-6).

If an unclean animal died and touched something, the thing would become unclean; it was to be put into water and would be unclean until evening (Leviticus 11:32). But if a dead animal touched a clay pot, the pot would have to be destroyed along with its contents (Leviticus 11:33-35). If a dead animal touched dry seeds, they would be clean, but if they were wet, they would be made unclean (Leviticus 11:37-38).

If a person touched a corpse, he would be unclean for seven days and unable to be in religious rites such as the Passover (Numbers 5:2; 9:6-10; 19:11, 16). If a person died in a tent, all who were in the tent would be unclean for a week (Numbers 19:14).

Priests were allowed to become unclean as a result of the death of close relatives, but not of in-laws (Leviticus 21:1-4). But the high priest could not become unclean for any relative (21:10-12); nor could Nazirites (Numbers 6:7). If a person died in the presence of a Nazirite, the Nazirite had to offer a sin offering and a burnt offering because he "sinned" by accidentally being in the presence of a dead body (verses 9-12).

People who were unclean because of a dead person could be cleansed by the water of cleansing, which was made with the ashes of a specially sacrificed red heifer (Numbers 19:9-13, 17-19). Although the ashes could be used to purify people from sin (Numbers 19:9), people who made the ashes were unclean, and those who touched the water were unclean until evening (19:7-10, 21). Those who failed to be cleansed in this way were to be expelled (9:13, 20).

On the day of Atonement, the high priest atoned for the uncleanness of the Israelites (Leviticus 16:16, 19, 30).

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Tithing: what is our Christian duty?

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about the danger of storing up wealth for self without being "rich toward God" (12:16-21). When the wealthy give banquets, they should invite the poor and the handicapped (14:12-13). When we use wealth to help others, we gain "treasure in heaven" (12:33). This helps us have our heart in heavenly things instead of earthly, temporary things (12:34).

"No servant can serve two masters.... You cannot serve both God and Money" (16:13). But money competes for our allegiance; it tempts us to seek our own desires rather than the needs of the kingdom. After the rich man went

away sad, Jesus exclaimed: "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom" (18:24-25).

Conclusion

Christians have a need to give, to share their resources and blessings with others. They have a duty to support the preaching of the gospel, to give financial support to their spiritual leaders, and the Church needs this support. If disciples of Jesus Christ can give, but do not, they are falling short.

The old covenant required 10 percent. The new covenant does not specify a percentage, and since we do not have a clear command from Scrip-

ture, we cannot command this precise percentage for members today.

However, the new covenant admonishes people to give what they can, and tithing still provides an instructive comparison. For some people, 10 percent may be too much. But some will be able to give more, and some are already doing so. Christians should examine their own circumstances and the better blessings they have been given in the new covenant through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us and the gift of the Holy Spirit to us. Contributions should be given to the Church for its collective work of preaching the gospel and the expenses involved in the local ministry and congregational needs.

The new covenant does not specify any percentage for festival attendance. Each member will have to decide how much is appropriate for the annual occasions in which we meet together to celebrate Christ's acts of salvation. But since the Church has administrative expenses in association with these festivals, members should contribute part of their funds to such administrative needs, and the Church continues to suggest that members give 10 percent of their festival savings if they are able to.⁸

The new covenant does not specify any particular percentage for assisting the poor. Instead, it asks for equity—and we certainly have room for improvement in this duty.

The old covenant required simple percentages. Everyone knew how much was required. The new covenant has no set percentages. Instead, it requires more soul-searching, more training for the conscience, more selfless love for others, more faith, more voluntary sacrifice and less compulsion. It tests our values, what we treasure most, and where our hearts are.

2 It is not clear precisely how this worked. Was the entire flock counted, or only the lambs? In some bad years, the flock would come back no larger than it had been the previous year, so it wouldn't make sense to tithe on all the adults again. Perhaps only lambs were counted—older sheep being defined as those who jumped *over* the rod (held at a certain height) instead of ducking under it.

3 It might be argued that the tithes were holy and therefore had always been holy, even before the old covenant was made. That is possible, but it cannot be proven, and therefore cannot be used to make requirements for God's people today. The firstlings were also holy to the Lord, but this was based on events of the Exodus, not of creation. And we do not consider them holy today. "Once holy, always holy" is not a valid principle in the light of Christ's atoning work on the cross.

4 There is support for this in the apocryphal book of Tobit 1:6-8, Josephus' *Antiquities* 4.4.3; 4.8.8; 4.8.22, and the second-century B.C. book *Jubilees* 32:10-14. Some sources suggest that this second tithe was calculated on the basis of the 90 percent left after the first tithe, not the original 100 percent (Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief* 63 BCE-66 CE, p. 167; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*,

"Tithe," vol. 4, p. 863, citing the Mishna *Maaser sheni* 2.1.)

5 It is possible to have two tithes, but it is not possible to have two sets of firstborn animals. The firstlings were not only holy to the Lord and given to the Levites (Numbers 18:15-17), but the people also ate them in the presence of the Lord at the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 15:19-20). The firstlings were therefore shared between the original owners and the Levites.

6 Sanders, p. 149. Since farmers had income in only six out of every seven years, they gave on average 3.33 percent of their income to the poor. Since tradesmen had income during sabbatical and jubilee years, they gave 2.8 percent on average.

7 If anyone thought a portion of their money was holy, we might assume that they would give it to a Christian minister, but the Corinthians were not giving any to Paul. The entire new covenant is silent about required percentages.

8 We could just as easily have picked 9 percent or 11 percent—it is an arbitrary figure based on administrative needs. Our "tithe of the festival tithe" never had any biblical foundation, at least in regard to specifying a percentage. The Levites gave a tithe of their tithes to the high priest, but that had nothing to do with festival expenses.

Unclean: why did God give these rules?

Continued from page 6

Various skin diseases could cause a person to be considered unclean. If a sore was more than skin deep and the hair turned white, the person was unclean (Leviticus 13:3, 20, 25, etc.). If the skin problem spread, the priest pronounced the person unclean (Leviticus 13:8, 22, 27). Such persons had to live outside the camp and warn people that they were unclean (Leviticus 13:45-46).

When the people could be declared clean, the priest killed a bird, dipped another bird in the blood, sprinkled the person and released the live bird (Leviticus 14:2-7). The person then had to shave and wash twice before he was fully clean (Leviticus 14:8-9), then offer a guilt offering and a sin offering, and the priest was to anoint him on the right earlobe, the right thumb and the right big toe (Leviticus 14:10-32).

Surprisingly, if the problem covered the entire body, the person was clean (Leviticus 13:12-13). And if the sores turned white, the person was clean (Leviticus 13:16-17).

Mildew was a similar problem. Clothing with spreading mildew was unclean and had to be burned (Leviticus 13:47-55); even if washing helped, the affected material had to be destroyed.

If a building had a spreading mildew, it had to be scraped and repaired; if the mildew returned, the entire house had to be dumped outside the town in an "unclean" place (Leviticus 14:33-45). If the mildew did not return, the house was declared clean after a ceremony in which one bird was killed and the other released (Leviticus 14:48-53).

Purpose of the ceremonies

The laws of uncleanness are unusual, and the purification ceremonies are, too. Why would a red heifer be more effective than a black one? Was there any public-health reason for dumping sacrificial ashes in a clean place rather than an unclean one?

Does the legislation forbid husbands and wives to sleep in the same bed 25 percent of the time? Why was sexual intercourse defiling? Why were sin offerings required for circumstances beyond a person's control? Why were pots broken rather than purified in a fire? Were people supposed to avoid uncleanness if they could? Was it somehow sinful to help bury a dead relative?

Why did the water of cleansing make some people clean and others unclean? Why are the rules so concerned about contagious skin diseases, but not any other contagious diseases? Why is a person affected from head to toe considered clean? Why anoint the right big toe instead of the left little toe?

There are many questions we cannot answer. The distinction between clean and unclean, as far as we can understand, seems to have been arbitrary. Above all, the rules reminded the Israelites that they were different from other peoples. Births and deaths reminded the people to get right with God. Daily activities reminded the people that they were not perfectly holy. Various taboos gave the people frequent reminders that God had something to say about how they lived. Sacred things were different from ordinary things, and the Israelite nation, being holy to God, was different from other nations.

Laws about uncleanness might have given the Israelites some public-

health benefits, but those benefits seem more incidental than purposeful. The quarantining of skin diseases may have helped prevent their spread, but it would have been better to quarantine other diseases, instead. It would have been good to wash before childbirth as well as afterward. If mildew was a public-health hazard, it would have been dangerous for anyone to scrape the inside of the house walls.

God did not claim any health benefits for these rules. Therefore, although we might discern, from our 20th-century perspective, some health benefits to some practices, we cannot claim that they were *all* principles of health. These laws do not authorize us, as Christians, to examine skin sores and expel people from church services if their sores have gotten larger. (But, as an expression of love for others, we rightly quarantine for contagious diseases that the Pentateuch does not mention.)

We do not forbid people to take the New Testament Passover if they touched a dead person the previous day. We do not check to see who has slept on which bed or how long it's been since they had a discharge of some sort. If we kill a mosquito on our arm, for an extreme example, we do not wash our clothes and consider ourselves unclean until evening even though we have been touched by the body of an unclean animal.

Moreover, we have no scriptural guidelines telling us which customs were arbitrary and which were beneficial. Therefore, we have no biblical reason to reject one rule and retain another. All the procedures for washing are now obsolete (Hebrews 9:10), superseded by the spiritual cleansing that Christ gives. In the new covenant, we do not have any rules for cleansing; they are not relevant to our relationship with God. (Of course, we believe in good hygiene and sanitation, but this is not under discussion in the biblical concepts of clean and unclean.)

Jesus' example is instructive. He touched people with leprosy and people with discharges (Matthew 8:3; 9:20). Even though the people were healed, under the old covenant rules, both they and Jesus would technically be unclean until evening. However, Jesus made no effort to avoid this. Nor do we read that Jesus ever participated in a cleansing ceremony. In the new covenant, a nocturnal emission or menstruation does not affect our status with God. It is not wrong to touch a dead person. There is nothing to repent of, to ask forgiveness for or to be cleansed of in the religious sense.

Unclean meat

Now let us look at the distinction between clean and unclean animals. It's the same Hebrew word; there is no indication in the Bible that this uncleanness was different in nature or in purpose to other types of uncleanness.

Noah was told to make a distinction between clean and unclean animals (Genesis 7:1-9). We are not told *why* Noah was to make the distinction; the only evidence we have in Genesis is that the clean animals were used for sacrifice (Genesis 8:20). It was *after* the flood that God said, "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (Genesis 9:3). This indicates that humans did not eat *any* meat before the flood.² For Noah, the distinction between clean and unclean animals was for sacrifices; the pas-

sage says nothing about clean and unclean in reference to eating meat.

After the flood, Noah was allowed to eat "*all* the beasts of the earth and *all* the birds of the air ... *every* creature ... *all* the fish ... *everything* that lives and moves ... *everything*" (Genesis 9:2-4). Blood was listed as an exception, but unclean animals were not. The implication is, and the traditional Jewish interpretation is, that Noah could eat any kind of meat he wanted, just as he could eat any kind of green plant he wanted.³

We are familiar with the list of clean and unclean animals in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. But we might notice that God makes no claims regarding health. He does not say that camels have more parasites than cows do, or that fish-eating herons are more hazardous to us

If a person thinks that eating pork is a sin, then he should avoid pork—just as a person who thinks that drinking alcohol is a sin ought to avoid alcohol. 'The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.'

than fish-eating ducks. He simply gives some rules that appear arbitrary. We are not told why honeybees are unclean but honey can be eaten. We are not told why bottom-feeding carp may be eaten but bottom-feeding catfish cannot, or why grasshoppers are OK but crabs are not. Or perhaps we might wonder whether camel's milk and human milk are equally forbidden.

If anyone touched a dead unclean animal, he would be unclean until evening (Leviticus 11:24-26). However, the same penalty applied to Israelites who touched a dead clean animal or ate any of it (Leviticus 11:39-40; 17:15). Leviticus 5:2-6 prescribes the additional penalty of a sin offering and a guilt offering even for accidental touching.

Why did God give these rules? Leviticus 11:44-45 gives this reason: Since God is holy (separate), he wanted his people to be holy and distinct from other cultures. He wanted them to make distinctions in what they could do and what they should not. It was a reminder of holiness.

Leviticus 20:24-26 gives a similar reason: God set the Israelites apart from the nations, so they must therefore make a distinction between animals. "I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations. You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals.... You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own."⁴

The rules in Deuteronomy 14 begin (verse 2) and end (verse 21) with a similar setting apart. If the Israelites found something dead, they were not allowed to eat it, but a gentile *could* eat it. "Do not eat anything you find already dead. You may give it to an

alien living in any of your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are a people holy to the LORD your God."

The meat was unclean, but it could be given or sold to a gentile. But God would not encourage something harmful to be given to a gentile. In this case, the distinction between clean and unclean applied only to Israelites. Israelites had different rules than gentiles; the rules about uncleanness separated the Israelite nation from gentile nations.

The Bible never indicates that the uncleanness of animals was different from any other sorts of uncleanness. They served similar purposes. The Bible doesn't make any claims about health benefits in these chapters. Although we can see some health benefits to avoiding certain types of meat, these benefits appear to be incidental rather than the primary purpose of the list. If the problem was parasites, for example, the simple solution would have been to require cooking. Moreover, clean animals have parasites, just as unclean animals do.

If health were the primary purpose, then God didn't include enough laws. If God wanted to give us health laws, he would need to spend more time advocating exercise and sleep rather than forbidding seagulls and bats, which few people want to eat anyway. He would need to tell us about which mushrooms are dangerous, and which herbs increase our chances for cancer. He would need to tell us about heavy metals that can poison us invisibly.

Using human reason and scientific data, we might be able to discern some health benefits to avoiding certain types of unclean meat, but we cannot with biblical authority say that they are all harmful to health. The rules presumably did not harm the Israelites' health, but neither did God claim that this set of laws would benefit their health. He promised to help their health if they obeyed the entire covenant (Deuteronomy 7:15), but this was described as a supernatural blessing, not simply a natural result of a better diet. The laws were given in terms of holiness, not health. Holiness and health may overlap, but they are not synonymous.

God told the Israelites to make a distinction between the clean and the unclean because he had made a distinction between the Israelites and the gentiles.

Under the new covenant, however, God does *not* make a distinction between Israelites and gentiles. He dwells in us all. We all have access to God equally—God hears our prayers whether we have touched a dead body or not, whether we have eaten pork or not. He calls on us to be holy, but in matters of the heart rather than external rules that have no connection with morality. Just as circumcision is now a matter of the heart, so also is the distinction between the clean and the unclean (Hebrews 10:22; James 4:8).

Jews have traditionally considered dietary rules to be unnecessary for gentiles. Gentiles needed to observe these restrictions only if they wanted to become proselytes and come under the covenant made at Sinai. Gentiles could be saved, the rabbis taught, by observing laws that go back to Noah, and avoiding unclean meat was not part of their requirements.⁵ In this way, the Jews acknowledged that Genesis does not forbid the eating of unclean meat, and that it is a ceremonial matter,

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Personal: law not dependent on Mosaic administration

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those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14-15).

The laws regarding washings were temporary, but they were an administration of a law that was more permanent: our need to be spiritually clean—righteous. When we are declared righteous by faith, we are effectively obeying the intent of the laws regarding washings and ritual cleansings. When we are forgiven, our consciences are cleansed. We are declared clean. (This, of course, does not negate the New Testament teachings on baptism.)

Likewise, we are obeying the law of circumcision when God circumcises our attitudes, becoming circumcised "of the heart" (Romans 2:29). If we repent and believe in our Savior, we are already obedient to the intent of the law of circumcision, and external circumcision is therefore not necessary.

The real spiritual law—allegiance to God—is eternally valid; the physical administration of its details is not. In the case of circumcision, the deeper and greater meaning of the law has superseded the external details of the law, and it is not necessary to keep both.

As a further illustration, we can also consider the laws regarding blue tassels and phylacteries (Numbers 15:38-40; Deuteronomy 22:12; 6:6-8; 11:18-20). These customs had symbolic meaning, and both the intent and the practice were commanded, but they were never specifically declared obsolete in the New Testament. However, in the relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ, physical phylacteries and tassels are not required—but the spiritual (nonphysical) law still is.

Christ fulfills the spiritual law in us, keeping us mindful of his law and thus fulfilling the purpose or intent of phylacteries and tassels. Because of Christ, and through Christ, the spirit has superseded the letter. We live in a different age, under a different administration of God's law.

God's spiritual law is written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 8:10). This does not mean details such as sin offerings and cere-

monial washings and the surgical removal of a part of the body. Rather, it means the spiritual intent behind those symbolic regulations. It means the fruit of the Holy Spirit, for example (Galatians 5:22-23).

The law of Moses, in contrast, was more than the people were able to bear (Acts 15:5, 10). When the Jerusalem conference discussed the "law of Moses," no particular segment was singled out as distinct from the law as a whole. It was the law given 430 years after the promise was given to Abraham (Galatians 3:15-25); it was the covenant that is now obsolete

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(Hebrews 8:13).

Anciently, God commanded Israel to have only one central worship location—the tabernacle or temple. This was symbolic of monotheism, and it discouraged polytheism. But it also made religious observances difficult for those who lived far from the central city.

Now, the new covenant does not give the same significance to a special location; our worship is not centered on Jerusalem. Jesus has replaced the tabernacle and temple, and our worship centers on him. We are still to be monotheistic, but freed of any geographic and ethnic focus.

The purpose of the central-location law is valid, but the physical application is obsolete. The spiritual law has not been abolished, but it is fulfilled in a spiritual way, through Jesus Christ.

God's law has always existed. It did not originate with Moses. God's spiritual law does not depend on its Mosaic administration. Before

Moses, Abraham was said to be obedient not only to God's laws, but also to his requirements, commands and decrees (Genesis 26:5).

But this does not mean that Abraham obeyed all the specific decrees and requirements that God gave the Israelites through Moses. Abraham did not look to a Levitical priesthood, or weekly offerings of showbread, or the ashes of a red heifer. Abraham did not obey all the specific regulations commanded through Moses, but he did obey the spiritual intent of God's commands.

Many Mosaic rules still valid

There is a law behind the law of Moses. The way law was administered under the old covenant was a valid expression of God's holy, spiritual, righteous law, and it was perfectly appropriate for its situation: a nation that did not have the spiritual blessings given under the new covenant. But the old covenant administration is not appropriate for the situation we find ourselves in after the death of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

That's why the old covenant is now obsolete—it was only intended to be temporary. The laws of Moses—the package of old covenant laws—are not a valid law code for the Church today. They were expressions of holiness for the ancient Israelites, but not for us today. We are sanctified in the heart because of Christ's work on our behalf, and then holy behavior flows from Christ's indwelling presence.

Although the old covenant as a whole is obsolete and invalid, that does not automatically invalidate everything included in it. Many of the Mosaic rules, especially those concerning the way we should treat other people, are still valid applications of God's purpose.

Jesus intensified them in the Sermon on the Mount, for example: Do not hate, do not be unfaithful, do not lie, do not seek revenge, love your enemies. This is part of the holy living Christ wants us to do. These laws are valid not because they were written by Moses, but because they describe the behavior that the Holy Spirit writes in our hearts.

But many other laws of Moses, especially those concerning worship details (we are speaking in general terms now to illustrate the way to understand Matthew 5:17; specific laws will be dealt with in other articles), are not valid practices because we have been given the spiritual fulfillment that those practices only symbolized.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their excessive focus on such rules (e.g., Matthew 23; Mark 7:11-13). Likewise today, we do not want to focus on worship rules so much that we neglect compassion. Our recent doctrinal changes encourage us to focus more on faith, and more on loving our neighbors. We cannot just keep a list of rules and isolate ourselves from society and think that we are living a Christlike life. We are called to greater activity—greater service.

In summary, laws can remain in the Bible and remain valid in purpose, yet we may no longer be required to keep them in their old covenant application. Circumcision and sacrifices are excellent examples of the distinction we need to make.

A simple citation of Matthew 5:17 cannot automatically prove that an Old Testament law must be administered in the way it was under Moses. We have understood that for many years in the laws of circumcision and sacrifices and washings, and our Lord and Savior is graciously leading us to see it regarding other old covenant practices, too.

In some cases the laws were given before Sinai (circumcision), and in other cases after Sinai (sacrifices). In all cases, Christians must examine them from the perspective of Jesus Christ and the new covenant.

Study with a willing mind

With this *Worldwide News* are several study papers that give more details. Please study them prayerfully, with a willing mind, with an open Bible, seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit.

See what the Bible says about these practices—whether they are eternal truths, or rather a specific administration of a spiritual truth. We do not want to confuse the law with the administration of the law nor neglect the centrality of Jesus Christ's atoning work on the cross for us. See how the New Testament approaches these subjects.

Brethren, I know that these changes are difficult for many people to understand, since we have spent years dogmatically teaching a specific administration of these laws. It will take time to make the transition. Help each other have faith in Christ and give our worries and concerns to him. Let's have confidence in him. Many of you are tremendous sources of stability for others, and I thank you for your loyal service.

Unclean: ceremonial laws no longer required

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not a moral one. Christians today have a relationship with God based on the covenant of faith and promise made with Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9). Faith leads us to worship and obey our Lord and Savior, but ceremonial laws are no longer required.

Laws that were added at Sinai do not set aside or add to the Abraham-covenant (verses 15-17). Circumcision is an example: it was added after the promise was given to Abraham, and is not necessary for Christians today. It may or may not have health benefits, but they are incidental and not a basis for religious requirement.

Although the distinction between

clean and unclean animals existed before Abraham for sacrificial purposes, the meat of unclean animals was not a prohibited food until after the old covenant had been made. Under the old covenant, unclean meats were a matter of ethnic separation and worship regulation, and the rules are therefore not a matter of sin today—just as it is not a sin to touch a dead body or to have a skin disease or kiss your wife while she is menstruating.

Mark 7:15-19

In Mark 7:15-19, Jesus said: "Nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'.... For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body."

Jesus was addressing the Pharisees'

practice of handwashing before every meal (verse 3). This washing was not because of their concern for personal hygiene, but because they did not want their eating to make them ceremonially unclean. Jesus phrased his analysis of their practice with a general statement that applies to foods as well as hands and utensils.

In the Old Testament, uncleanness was a matter of external matters. Even touching an unclean thing, let alone eating it, could defile a person. Therefore, Jesus' statement that nothing entering a person defiled him or made him unclean overthrew a basic principle of that whole system. A person was defiled by what came out of his heart, not by what physically touched his body. God looks on the heart, not the

stomach; he judges our attitudes, not our diets.

The Greek text of verse 19b is disputed. In the textual version used by the King James translators, the participle "cleansing" seems to be part of the words of Jesus. In this version, Jesus says, "Foods cannot make people unclean, since they go through the body, thus purifying all foods." In this version, Jesus is talking about the digestive system and elimination.

There are two problems with this textual version and interpretation. First, the New Testament does not use the word *katharizo* with the meaning of "purge" in any other passage. It normally refers to cleansing

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Unclean: what did the apostle Paul teach?

Continued from page 8

in a religious sense, either through ceremonies or by a cleansing of the conscience through forgiveness. The context in this passage is ceremonial cleansing. Second, the digestive process and bowel movements can get rid of dirt, but soil particles were not the concern of the Pharisees. The context is ceremonial cleanness, and the digestive process cannot make anyone or anything religiously clean.

The Greek text used by most translations differs by only one Greek letter from that used by the King James translators. The different letter links the participle "cleansing" with the "he" in verse 18. The thought then is this: "He said [most of verses 18-19], cleansing all foods."

Thus verse 19b is not Jesus' words but Mark's comment about the significance of what Jesus had said. That is why many translations place verse 19b outside their quotation marks. The text they are basing their translation on requires this. Mark explains that Jesus' principle can be applied to all foods, including meats.

The text of verse 19b is debatable, but our understanding of clean and unclean meats does not depend on this one word. The broader context is Jesus' teaching that foods do not defile people. Under the new covenant, pork does not cut anyone off from God. Paul echoed Jesus' words when he wrote that all foods are clean, as we will see below.

We are not qualified as textual critics. We don't know enough about Greek or texts to be dogmatic about which text is correct. Nevertheless, our understanding is not based on debatable points of textual criticism. Rather, it is founded on Jesus' teaching, contrary to the old covenant, that nothing entering a person can defile that person. And it is based on the broader context of the entire new covenant revelation.

Many Christians accept Mark 7:15-19 (in either textual version) as clear evidence that all meats may be eaten. Therefore, we should not use Church discipline to enforce compliance with what believers are convinced is an unbiblical rule.

Peter's vision

As we move forward in the New Testament, we come to Acts 10. Peter was given a vision of all sorts of animals and told to kill and eat (verse 13). He protested, saying that he had never eaten anything common or unclean, but the command was given again and again.

The vision was then explained: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (verse 15). Peter also explained the vision: "God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean" (verse 28). Therefore, even if Cornelius had been eating pork, he was neither common nor unclean. Those distinctions were no longer valid. His food could not make him unclean.

Why did Peter use both "unclean" (*akathartos*) and "common" (*koinos*)? Some have suggested that *koinos* refers to clean animals made temporarily unclean by proximity to unclean animals. The two words have different root words, but their meanings overlap. *Koinos* was the uncleanness that the Pharisees were concerned about in Mark 7. The verb form of the word, *koinoo* (to make something common), is used in Hebrews 9:13 to refer to the kind of uncleanness that had to be cleansed by the water made with the ashes of

a red heifer, and the Hebrew word for that is the same word as used for unclean animals. *Koinos* and *akathartos* have roughly the same meaning.⁶

In the vision, the unclean animals represented gentiles. In vision, the animals were called cleansed. Peter understood from this that gentiles were cleansed. But would Peter understand this conclusion if unclean animals were not in fact declared clean? If the animal remained unclean, wouldn't the person it represented also remain unclean? God was showing Peter that Christians were no longer separate from gentiles—his people included gentiles. The laws of separation no longer applied. The meats that were commonly eaten among the gentiles did not make them religiously unacceptable.

This passage does not directly say that God cleansed all foods, but many readers have seen that implication. There is certainly nothing in Acts 10 to counteract that implication—nor is there any discussion of unclean meat in Acts 15, when the Jerusalem council decided that gentile converts did not have to keep the "law of Moses" and gave them only four prohibitions.

Since the Jewish rabbis did not think that gentiles were required to avoid pork unless they became circumcised proselytes, and the council (composed exclusively of Jewish Christians) was inspired to conclude that circumcision was not required, the implication in this historical context is that the council did not require gentiles to quit eating unclean meats.

In the vision, why did Peter refuse to eat the unclean animals? Because he did not yet understand that they could be considered clean. He did not understand the implications of Jesus' comment. He did not yet understand that common meat (by anyone's definition) could be eaten. In his own experience as a Jew and as a Jewish Christian, he had "never eaten anything impure or unclean" (Acts 10:14).

His understanding was incomplete; he learned a bit at a time. Moreover, he did not perfectly live up to what he understood, as Paul points out in Galatians 2. Peter withdrew from gentile tables when legalistic Jewish Christians came to Antioch, and Paul rightly criticized Peter's hypocrisy. Those legalistic believers would have known from Jesus' teachings that handwashing and other nonbiblical rules were wrong. Yet they were still making separations between Jews and gentiles.

Paul notes that Peter normally ate with gentiles, not considering them unclean (Galatians 2:12). Peter lived "like a Gentile and not like a Jew," and the Church should not "force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs" (verse 14).

Romans 14

We turn next to Romans 14, which tells us that all foods are clean, and it discusses the delicate matter of handling people in the same congregation who disagree as to what foods are permissible.

One of the issues in Romans 14 is vegetarianism, but Paul's explanation of the subject applies to meats, too, especially when he says: "As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean [*koinos*] in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean" (verse 14). He says something similar in verse 20:

"All food is clean [*katharos*], but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble."

The Roman church included both Jews and gentiles, and some of the Jewish Christians may have been vegetarians because they distrusted the cleanness of all meats. Whether that is the case or not, Paul's statements are general principles that may be applied to all matters of clean and unclean foods. When Paul said that no food is unclean, he used the Greek word *koinos*, which means common or ordinary, unclean or defiled. He clearly said that all foods are clean, using *katharos*, the same word Jews used for cleanness and clean animals.

Paul did not qualify his statements or restrict their application, even for a church area he had not been in before, even though it contained both Jews and gentiles. Paul's gentile readers in Rome would have understood that pork was a food and that it was clean or OK to eat.

But Paul knew that some of his readers would not accept his analysis. He did not demand that they agree. Instead, he encouraged them to remain true to their convictions,

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Paul wrote to the strong in faith: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (verse 1). Is the matter of unclean meat a disputable matter? Yes. One person's belief may allow him to eat all meats, but another person may believe that he ought to abstain from pork and shrimp. "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does" (verse 3). It is not wrong to abstain, but it is wrong to condemn someone else.

"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.... We will all stand before God's judgment seat," Paul advised in verses 4 and 10. "He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God" (verse 6). Whether we eat or whether we abstain, we should do it in an attitude of submission to Christ.

If a person thinks that eating pork is a sin, then he should avoid pork—just as a person who thinks that drinking alcohol is a sin ought to avoid alcohol. "The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (verse 23). Each person must be fully convinced about the way in which he serves the Lord (verse 5). It's not that all ways are equally acceptable, but that each person should be fully convinced. The attitude is more important than

the action itself.

Paul also cautions that the strong should not flaunt their liberty. "It is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble" (verse 20). "If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil" (verses 15-16). "Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way" (verse 13).

In the Church today, many people believe that it is wrong to eat pork.⁷ Their experience would be similar to Peter's. They have not eaten pork or shrimp. It would be wrong for anyone to pressure such members into eating pork. "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall" (verse 21).

"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food," Paul says to everyone (verse 20). Do not let disputable matters lead to dissension and judging within the Church. "Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God" (verse 22). That does not mean that you have to keep your beliefs secret, of course (Paul did not)—it means that your belief affects your own relationship with God; it should not intrude into other peoples' relationships with God.

And Paul closes with a warning for the strong, lest they take their liberty too far: "Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves" (verse 22). Do not sin by flaunting your belief in such a way that you cause others to sin.

Conclusion

The last relevant scripture is 1 Timothy 4:3-5, which says that all food may be eaten if it is "consecrated by the word of God." Does the Bible consecrate all meats? Romans 14:20 says yes—all are clean. Everything that God has created is good (verse 4). However, this passage does not comment on whether all meats are good for our health, just as it does not say that all vegetables are good for food. Whether it is good for food is up to people to judge, just as it was in the days after Noah's flood. The distinctions given in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 do not tell us.

Of course, many people may want to avoid pork just in case it *might* be harmful to health. That is certainly permissible, but we cannot make that a religious requirement for those who do not have such beliefs. The Bible does not say that those rules had anything to do with health, so we cannot say that they do. Some meats, of course, are actually unhealthful, but the Church is not in the business of enforcing rules about health, whether it concerns meat or vegetables or minerals. This physical life is not our priority.

When Paul wrote that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that we should honor God with our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), he was talking about sexual sins, not about physical health. The holiness that God wants is in our morality, not in our diets. We are sanctified in our hearts, not in dietary customs. If we are discerning good from evil in our morality, then we are automatically obedient to the purpose of the clean/unclean rules about discharges and sores and meats.

Many will wish to continue to abstain from pork and shrimp

See Unclean, page 11

Announcements

BIRTHS, ENGAGEMENTS, WEDDINGS, ANNIVERSARIES AND OBITUARIES

GRENVILLE, Andrew and Miriam (Rawlyk) of Toronto, Ontario, boy, Cameron McLean, Jan. 11, 6:10 p.m., 10 pounds, first child.

HARRISON, Patrick and Laurie (Poffenroth) of Montreal, Quebec, girl, Cassandra Ashley, Sept. 30, 4:58 p.m., 5 pounds, now 2 girls.

HEES, Andrew and Elisa (Lee) of Conroe, Texas, girl, Shanna Elise, Nov. 29, 10:45 a.m., 5 pounds 14 ounces, first child.

ISEMEDE, Femi and Karla of Stockton, California, boy, Izien Santiago, Jan. 14, 8:20 p.m., 7 pounds 9 ounces, first child.

LOPEZ, Jesse and Sherie (Wallauch) of Albuquerque, New Mexico, boy, Zachary David, Sept. 28, 1:57 a.m., 7 pounds 13 ounces, now 1 boy, 1 girl.

MADLENA, Don and Joanna (Bates) of Atlanta, Georgia, boy, Anthony William, Jan. 12, 3:42 p.m., 7 pounds 4 ounces, first child.

MOLEN, Allen and Laarni (Castillon) of Iloilo, Philippines, girl, Rachel Audrey, Jan. 1, 5:10 p.m., 7 pounds 7 ounces, now 5 girls.

NOVAK, Steve and Anna-Leigh (Neither) of Austin, Texas, girl, Liana Kytticka, Jan. 10, 12:53 a.m., 8 pounds, first child.

RENZ, L. John and Kathy (Tateishi) of Syracuse, New York, boy, Michael Alexander Tsunetaro, Oct. 1, 4:51 a.m., 8 pounds 3 ounces, now 2 boys.

ROEDER, Marty and Vickie (Martin) of Dallas, Texas, boy, Aaron Louis, Dec. 20, 8:03 a.m., 8 pounds 4 ounces, first child.

SARROSA, Rodolfo Jr. and Fatima (Porlucas) of Iloilo, Philippines, girl, Myrtle Abigail, Dec. 7, 7:55 p.m., 7 pounds, now 1 boy, 1 girl.

SILBINGER, Jochanan and Militza (Cifuentes) of Tel Aviv, Israel, boy, Philip, Oct. 20, 11:07 a.m., 2.850 kilograms, first child.

SKINNER, Sean and Krisi (Nelson) of San Francisco, California, boy, Alexander Robert, July 2, 2:10 a.m., 6 pounds 6 ounces, first child.

STAMM, Lew and Joy (Malarik) of Sevierville, Tennessee, girl, Candace Clementine, Nov. 29, 3:20 p.m., 8 pounds 7 ounces, now 5 boys, 5 girls.

STEELE, Tony and Karen (Hayes) of Melbourne, Australia, girl, Caitlin Louise, Dec. 29, 1:22 p.m., 7 pounds 7 ounces, now 1 girl.

STRNAD, Peter and Pearl (Horschler) of Cicero, Illinois, girl, Talia April, Dec. 9, 3:48 p.m., 9 pounds 2 ounces, first child.

THACKER, Gene and Debby (Golden) of Lorain, Ohio, girl, Briana Lynn, Oct. 11, 3:26 p.m., 7 pounds, now 2 girls.

WALTERMATE, Dwayne and Sally (LeVoi) of Parkville, Missouri, girl, Samantha Ann, Dec. 6, 11:35 a.m., 7 pounds 6 ounces, first child.

Engagements

Wayne and Marilyn Yelk of DeForest, Wisconsin, are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter Rachel Renee to Corwin Durant Petty, son of John and Betty Petty of Walnut Ridge, Arkansas. A May 28 wedding is planned.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Biskup of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Joseph Handley of Georgetown, Delaware, are happy to announce the engagement of their daughter Lisa Suzanne Handley to Shawn Lee Kifer, son of Mr. and Mrs. Larry Kifer of Irwin, Pennsylvania. An August wedding is planned.

Mr. and Mrs. George Edmonston of West Plains, Missouri, are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter Tara to Daniel Miller, son of Mr. and Mrs. Clark Miller of Pasadena. A May wedding is planned at Ambassador University.

Larry and Diana Dinger of San Diego, California, are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter Kristina Marie to Jeff Sieker, son of Andy and Judy Sieker of Wyalusing, Pennsylvania. A July wedding is planned.

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Kirishian of Federal Way, Washington, and Mr. and Mrs. Tad Lamb Sr. of Columbus, Ohio, are pleased to announce the engagement of their children, Rachel Kirishian and Tad Lamb. A summer wedding in Columbus is planned.

Mr. and Mrs. James Noble Pope Jr. of Holland Patent, New York, are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter Lia Maxine Manvell to William Melvin Jackson Jr. of Davenport, Virginia. A May 17 wedding is planned in Gladewater, Texas.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Cherry of Sumter, South Carolina, are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter Angela Elizabeth to Warren Dean Lee, son of Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Lee of Victoria, British Columbia. A March 12 wedding in South Carolina is planned.

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Weddings



BRIAN & BELINDA LEIHN
Belinda Anne Messer, daughter of David and Alice Messer of Sydney, Australia, and Brian Leonard Leihn, son of Leonard and Joan Leihn of Cardwell, Australia, were united in marriage Nov. 20. The ceremony was performed by Peter McLean, pastor of the Sydney South church. Therese Hensby and Natalie Anderson, cousins of the bride, attended the bride, and Vern Cordingley and Peter Leihn attended the groom. The couple live in Armidale, Australia.



CLAYTON & NICOLA MAYHEW
Nicola Christine Marshall, daughter of Ross and Pam Andrew, and Clayton Carl Mayhew, son of Lance and Brenda Mayhew, were united in marriage April 17. The ceremony was performed by Dennis Gordon, a minister in the Wellington, New Zealand, church. Trudi Marshall, sister of the bride, was maid of honor, and Aaron Mayhew, brother of the groom, was best man. The couple live in Wellington.



PAUL & MESHAWN SENIOR
Meshawn Waldon, daughter of James Waldon and LaVerne Adside of Palm Beach, Florida, and Paul Senior, son of Bob and Kay Senior of Hollywood, Florida, were united in marriage Nov. 25. The ceremony was performed by Craig Bacheller, pastor of the Key West, Miami and Hollywood churches. Lisa Barker, Dhanmate Aponte, and Julie Spencer attended the bride. Raymond Gayo, Kenneth Barker and Christian Waldon attended the groom. The couple live in Hollywood.



ANTHONY & CATHERINE DI SANTO
Catherine Febraro, daughter of Frank and Concetta Febraro of Toronto, Ontario, and Anthony Di Santo, son of Joseph and Tina Di Santo of Toronto, were united in marriage July 10. The ceremony was performed by Perc Burrows, associate pastor of the Toronto West and Central churches. Angela Febraro, sister of the bride, was maid of honor, and Tony Nestico was best man. The couple live in Toronto.



ARTHUR & AMANDA BAUDOIN
Amanda Evelyn Meyers, daughter of Ina Meyers of Ponchatoula, Louisiana, and Xavier Meyers of Kenner, Louisiana, and Arthur Emile Baudoin, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Baudoin of Slidell, Louisiana, were united in marriage Sept. 4. The ceremony was performed by the groom's father, a minister in the Picayune, Mississippi, church. Brandi Newman was maid of honor, and Josh Baudoin, brother of the groom, was best man. The couple live in Kenner.



THOMAS & BECKY STANALAND
Becky Yoder and Thomas Stanaland were united in marriage Aug. 7. The ceremony was performed by Clyde

Kilough, pastor of the Akron, Ohio, church. Katie Wengard was maid of honor, and Joseph Wengard was best man. The couple live in Akron.



TREVOR & CYNTHIA MCPHERSON
Cynthia McGowan of Dunstable, England, and Trevor McPherson of Ocho Rios, Jamaica, were united in marriage Dec. 11 in Luton, England. The ceremony was performed by James Newby, assistant pastor of the Watford, England, church. Hyacinth and Taneisha Bogle were bridesmaids, and Herbert McGowan was best man. The couple live in Luton.



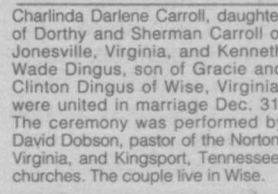
TED & GAIL LEEMING
Gail Bartley and Ted Leeming were united in marriage Aug. 27. The ceremony was performed by Frank Richi, pastor of the Barrie and Muskoka Falls, Ontario, churches. The couple live in Bracebridge, Ontario.



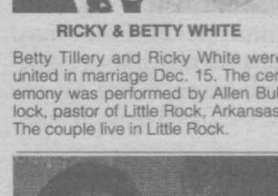
FRANCIS & CANDACE MARRAST
Candace James and Francis Trevor Marrast were united in marriage Sept. 10. The ceremony was performed by Tom Oakley, pastor of the Brooklyn, New York, church. Jennifer Marshall was maid of honor, and Errol Seales was best man. The couple live in Brooklyn.



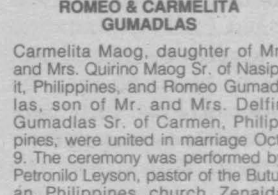
DAVID & JAN RANERI
Jan Robinson and David Raneri were united in marriage June 11. The ceremony was performed by Greg Johnson, pastor of Cleveland, Ohio, West church. The couple live in Cleveland.



RICKY & BETTY WHITE
Betty Tillery and Ricky White were united in marriage Dec. 15. The ceremony was performed by Allen Bullock, pastor of Little Rock, Arkansas. The couple live in Little Rock.



ROMEO & CARMELITA GUMDLAS
Carmelita Maog, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Quirino Maog Sr. of Nasipit, Philippines, and Romeo Gumdlas, son of Mr. and Mrs. Delfin Gumdlas Sr. of Carmen, Philippines, were united in marriage Oct. 9. The ceremony was performed by Petronilo Leyson, pastor of the Butuan, Philippines, church. Zenaida Maog, sister of the bride, was maid of honor, and Delfin Gumdlas Jr., brother of the groom, was best man. The couple live in Nasipit.



BUDDY & MARY FORD
Alvis "Buddy" and Mary Claudine Ford of Greenville, Kentucky, celebrated their 30th anniversary Oct. 8. They have two daughters, Mary and Teresa; two sons, Phillip and Tony; two sons-in-law, Michael Beadnell and Kenneth Lee; a daughter-in-law, Tracy; five grandchildren, Amy, Justin, Michael, Melissa and Dekota; and a step-grandson, Adam.



JOSEPH & ARLENE OMERO
Arlene Lecera, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rogelio Lecera, and Joseph Omero, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Omero of Digos, Philippines, were united in marriage Sept. 18. The ceremony was performed by Eleno Cabahit, associate pastor of Davao, Kidapawan and General Santos, Philippines, churches. The couple live in Digos.

Anniversaries



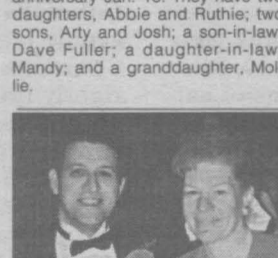
LANCE & BRENDA MAYHEW
Lance and Brenda Mayhew of Palmerston, New Zealand, celebrated their 25th anniversary Oct. 18. They have four children, Pamela, Clayton, Samuel and Aaron; two daughters-in-law, Nicki and Kylie; and seven grandchildren.



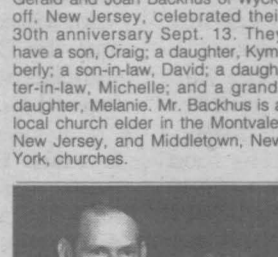
TERRY & BEV BROWNING
Terence and Beverley Browning of Johannesburg, South Africa, celebrated their 25th anniversary Nov. 23. They have three children, Gregory, Cara Mundell and Debra; a son-in-law, Dean Mundel; and a granddaughter, Stephanie Mundell. Mr. Browning is the pastor of the Johannesburg East church.



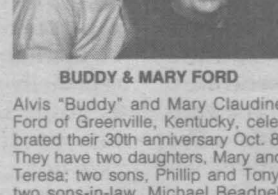
WAYNE & MARILYN YELK
Wayne and Marilyn Yelk of DeForest, Wisconsin, celebrated their 25th anniversary Sept. 21. They have two daughters, Rachel and Melissa.



RICHARD & RUDA ELTZROTH
Richard and Ruda Eltzroth of Dayton, Ohio, celebrated their 25th anniversary Jan. 18. They have a son, Eric; and a daughter-in-law, Diana.



JOHN & LINDA POOLE ROLLINS
John and Linda Poole Rollins of Greenville, South Carolina, celebrated their 25th anniversary Dec. 27. They have a son, Jamie; and a daughter, Andi.



KEITH & SANDY HILLMAN
Keith and Sandy Hillman celebrated their 25th anniversary Feb. 14. They have a son, Chris; a daughter, Nikki;



EDWARD & JEANNE FRALEY
Edward and Jeanne Fraley celebrated their 30th anniversary Jan. 23. They have two daughters, Diana and Joanna; and two sons-in-law, Eric and Jay. Mr. and Mrs. Fraley serve as deacon and deaconess in the Fort Worth, Texas, East church.



LANCE & BRENDA MAYHEW
Lance and Brenda Mayhew of Palmerston, New Zealand, celebrated their 25th anniversary Oct. 18. They have four children, Pamela, Clayton, Samuel and Aaron; two daughters-in-law, Nicki and Kylie; and seven grandchildren.



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CLAYTON & RENEE STRAWN
Clinton and Renee Strawn of Pinconning, Michigan, celebrated their 25th anniversary Jan. 24. They have three sons, Matthew, David and Scott; two daughters-in-law, Lori and Lisa; and four grandsons.



WAYNE & MARILYN YELK
Wayne and Marilyn Yelk of DeForest, Wisconsin, celebrated their 25th anniversary Sept. 21. They have two daughters, Rachel and Melissa.



RICHARD & RUDA ELTZROTH
Richard and Ruda Eltzroth of Dayton, Ohio, celebrated their 25th anniversary Jan. 18. They have a son, Eric; and a daughter-in-law, Diana.



JOHN & LINDA POOLE ROLLINS
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KEITH & SANDY HILLMAN
Keith and Sandy Hillman celebrated their 25th anniversary Feb. 14. They have a son, Chris; a daughter, Nikki;

Births

ADAM, Richard and Ileen (Kahle) of Denver, Colorado, girl, Avery Ashley Nikole, Jan. 25, 5:30 p.m., 6 pounds 6 ounces, now 2 girls.

ADKINS, Justin and Deborah (Middleton) of Wentzville, Missouri, boy, Ethan Daniel, Jan. 4, 1:14 a.m., 8 pounds 9 1/2 ounces, now 2 boys, 1 girl.

AMATO, Michael and Karla (Myers) of Brooklyn, New York, boy, Frank Michael, Dec. 21, 3:44 p.m., 7 pounds 10 ounces, first child.

BEAUREGARD, Richard and Noreen (Krivach) of Indiana, Pennsylvania, boy, Raymond Krivach, Dec. 4, 8 pounds.

BENNINGFIELD, Wayne and Clela (Devine) of Paducah, Kentucky, boy, Jared Devin, July 31, 8 pounds 13 ounces, now 2 boys.

BETHEL, Leslie and Francelyn (Ritchie) of Nassau, Bahamas, boy, Kennedy Van-Jordan, Dec. 28, 8 pounds 11 1/4 ounces, now 1 boy, 1 girl.

BOYES, David and Patricia (Sigurdson) of Vancouver, British Columbia, girl, Kaitlynn Kristina Isabel, Nov. 7, 9:37 a.m., 8 pounds 13 ounces, now 1 boy, 1 girl.

BUSH, Mark and Victoria (Chatham) of Torrance, California, boy, Cody Chatham, Jan. 14, 8:31 a.m., 8 pounds 8 1/2 ounces, first child.

COLLEY, Greg and Sherry (Tucker) of Orlando, Florida, girl, Brigitte Danielle, Jan. 12, 9 pounds 3 ounces, now 1 boy, 1 girl.

CONDLEY, Brian and Heidi (Klett) of Russellville, Arkansas, boy, Jaron Craig, Aug. 18, 4:15 p.m., 8 pounds 6 1/2 ounces, first child.

CONRAD, Steven and Donna (Bordelon) of Houston, Texas, boy, Jacob Ryan, Nov. 27, 7:47 a.m., 9 pounds 1 ounce, now 1 boy, 1 girl.

ELLISTON, Peter and Zoe (Stephens) of Melbourne, Australia, boy, Stephen James, Jan. 7, 4:55 p.m., 7 pounds 7 ounces, first child.

ESCARA, George and Pamela (Diamante) of Iloilo, Philippines, boy, Kent Angelo, Dec. 28, 9:36 a.m., 7 pounds 2 ounces, now 1 boy, 2 girls.

FARMER, Mark and Shelby (High) of Elkhart, Indiana, boy, Matthew Charles, Jan. 23, 8:03 a.m., 8 pounds 7 ounces, now 1 boy, 1 girl.

and a daughter-in-law, Donna. Mr. Hillman is a local church elder in the Chicago, Illinois, West church.

Anniversaries Made of Gold



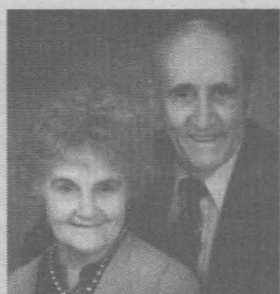
WILLIAM & JEAN BOYD

William and Jean Boyd of Naugatuck, Connecticut, celebrated their 70th anniversary Dec. 31. They have five children, Janet Dettmar, Marion Moruska, Jean Membrino, Catherine LaRosa and William Boyd; 13 grandchildren; and 17 great-grandchildren.



ELI & BARBARA BENEDICT

Eli and Barbara Benedict of Longview, Texas, celebrated their 50th anniversary Dec. 23. They have three daughters, Sharon, Donna and Patti; a son, Bruce; three sons-in-law, David Stonesifer, Jerry Patillo and Gary Hewitt; a daughter-in-law, Donna; and 10 grandchildren.



WARLAND & AUDREY CRAWFORD

Warland and Audrey Crawford of Coopersburg, Pennsylvania, celebrated their 60th anniversary Jan. 26. They have four sons, David, Warland "Bud," Clare and Mark (deceased); 18 grandchildren (one deceased); and 17 great-grandchildren.

Obituaries



JESSIE WALKER

WALKER, Jessie, 94, of Chicago, Illinois, died of cardiac arrest Jan. 13. She is survived by six nieces and one nephew, and 10 great-nieces and great-nephews.

GILLILAND, Mildred, 86, of Lorain, Ohio, died Dec. 24. She is survived by three daughters, Linda, Carol

and Martha; a son, Robert Jr.; eight grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband, Robert.

RANKIN, Marie, 84, of Charleston, West Virginia, died Dec. 29. She is survived by two nephews, Frank and Steven Cuvay.

McKENZIE, Lily, 82, of Castlegar, British Columbia, died Dec. 15. She is survived by her daughter, Mary Miller; nine grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

DUNDON, Rexford "Rex," 81, of Cascadia, Oregon, died Dec. 29. He is survived by his wife, Edna; two sons, Donald and Terry; a daughter, Linda Stiver; five grandchildren; and one great-grandson.



ELLA PUTORTI

PUTORTI, Ella, 81, of Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, died Nov. 3. She is survived by her husband, Bill; four sons; nine grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren.

HARRIS, Marion, 69, of Newark, New Jersey, died Dec. 10 after a long battle with kidney cancer. She is survived by two brothers and three sisters, and many nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her husband, Leonard.

McCreary, Nelda Cornelius, 69, of Hiawatha, Kansas, died of cancer June 2. She is survived by her husband, Thayne; four sons, Steven, David, Ronald and James; and

seven grandchildren.



PHILIP PLOVS

PLOVS, Philip Morton, 77, died of bone cancer Dec. 3. He is survived by his wife, Connie; two daughters, Marilyn and Jennifer; two sons-in-law, Philip Weir and Fred Lawson; and four grandchildren, Melissa and Amanda Weir and Mitchell and Kylie Lawson.



MATTIE WOOTSON

WOOTSON, Mattie L., 75, of Mount Prospect, Illinois, died from complications of lung cancer Jan. 13.

ADAMS, Amos Neil, 65, of Big Sandy died Jan. 11. He is survived by a son, John David; three brothers; four sisters; and many nieces and nephews.

STONE, Thomas A., 60, of Estacoda, Oregon, died Dec. 13 after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife, Kathy; his mother, Blanche; a

daughter, Trisha; two sons, Doug and Todd; and two grandchildren.



MARY JOHNSON

JOHNSON, Marie Jeanette, 66, of Jacksonville, Alabama, died of respiratory illness April 27. She is survived by her husband, Miles D.; five children, Don, Dale, Danny, Deborah Hughes and Dara Johnson; and 13 grandchildren.



YVONNE CROSS

CROSS, M. Yvonne, 60, of New Castle, Indiana, died of cancer Jan. 11. She is survived by two daughters, Sherri Granka and Cheryl Meyer; a son, David; two brothers, Robert and Eugene Caylor; and five grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her husband, Rhoton, a local church elder.

BREWINGTON, Barbara, 48, of Jersey City, New Jersey, died Nov. 18.

She is survived by two sisters, two brothers, eight children and 15 grandchildren.

FIALA, Steven Jon, 39, of Lincoln, Nebraska, died of bone marrow transplant complications of leukemia Jan. 19. He is survived by his wife, Janet, twin sons, John and Christopher, two daughters, Lisa and Adele; his parents, John and Lois; and his grandmother.

FIGGS, Rebecca "Becky" Diane, 24, of Milford, Delaware, died Aug. 19. She is survived by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Figgs; a daughter, Kelsea Renee; a sister and brother-in-law, Beverly and John Henry; her maternal grandmother, Betty Rutter; her paternal grandmother, Reba Beaton; and many aunts, uncles and cousins.



AGUSTIN ACERO

ACERO, Agustin Jr., 29, of Padre Burgos, Philippines, died Nov. 27. He is survived by his parents, two sisters and three brothers.

DOOLEY, Margaret Ann, 53, of Coeburn, Virginia, died of a gunshot wound Oct. 27. She is survived by a daughter and son-in-law, Vickie and Tray Bouldin; a son and daughter-in-law, Michael and Anja Dooley; her mother, Bertha Cowden; four brothers, Dale, Danny, Rickey, and Glenn; three sisters, Mary Dooley, Dorothy Canfield and Phyllis Cowdeer; and several nieces and nephews.

Unclean: kingdom of God not based on food or drink

Continued from page 9

because the act of eating such foods would violate their conscience. Of course, the Church is not insisting that Christians eat any such foods.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals was for sacrificial and ceremonial purposes, and, later, to distinguish Israelites from gentiles. The rules affected participation in the sacrificial system, and that context is now obsolete. The rules are not requirements today. The New Testament tells us that food cannot make us spiritually or physically unclean. All food is clean. It is not a sin to eat pork or shrimp or beef.

Not everyone will agree with this position, but this is what Paul writes. God's Church can peacefully contain people who have different opinions on this subject, just as the Roman church included people of different convictions. The kingdom of God is not based on food or drink, but on "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (verse 19).

Appendix

After this paper was written, we found a practical discussion of this topic in James Dunn's *Christian Liberty*.

"Most, but by no means all, agree that the issue [in Romans 14] focusses on the Jewish food laws.... The Jewish context of Christian beginnings in Rome, and the sustained Jew/Greek, Jew/Gentile motif in the letter itself, point strongly to that conclusion. More significant, however, is the language Paul uses in the discussion of the problem in Rom. 14. In particular, in verse 14 he speaks of things (here meaning food) that are 'unclean.' The word in Greek means simply 'common, ordinary' (*koinos*). The sense 'profane or unclean' derives entirely from the use

of *koinos* as the equivalent of the cultic terms in Hebrew *tame'* or *hol* ('unclean or profane'), an equivalence only explicit in our sources subsequent to the LXX rendering of the OT, but clearly evident in the increasing purity concerns of the Maccabean and post-Maccabean period. There are no real parallels in non-Jewish Greek.

"Almost certainly, then, the issue within the Christian house groups in Rome focussed on the Jewish distinction between clean and unclean food. This is borne out by verse 20, where it is clear that the opposite of *koinos* is *katharos*, 'clean,' for the distinction *katharos/akatharos*, 'clean/unclean' is regularly used in the LXX for the distinction between clean and unclean foods....

"The importance of the issue at stake in Rom. 14:1-15:6 can hardly be exaggerated. It was no mere issue of irrational food taboos, or of minor questions or of non-essentials....

"The language [of 14:3] is very striking and reveals a penetrating insight on Paul's part into the psychology of the groups involved. The one who eats (the strong) will be tempted to 'despise,' to hold in contempt those who do not eat (the weak). This, we may say, is the characteristic temptation for those who regard themselves as 'strong,' namely, to *despise* those whom they regard as 'weak.' The liberal in his broad-mindedness despises the conservative for his narrowness and legalistic scruples (as so perceived by the liberal). On the other hand, the one who does not eat (the weak) will be tempted to 'pass judgment on,' to condemn those who do eat, who ignore the food laws....

"The threat to Christian community is therefore clear. One section actually questions the Christian standing of another.... Paul's response to the more conservative is, first of all, to challenge the basic assumption which gives rise to the condemnation of the more liberal; that is, to chal-

lenge the traditionalists to recognize that Christianity is larger than their definition of it, to recognize that *God* accepts people whose views and practices *they* regard as unacceptable....

"Paul's second piece of counsel is that each should be fully convinced in his own mind on such contentious subjects which affected the oneness of the Christian congregations. Each should make up his own mind *for himself*....

"Christians will disagree with one another, and on important issues, and yet each can properly be convinced of the rightness of his or her position. Two believers can disagree, *and yet both be right* (that is, accepted by God). Given that we disagree, it is *not* necessary for *you* to be *wrong* in order that *I* should be *right*. There can be legitimate differences, on important matters, and equally held in good faith.... These different opinions are reached and lived out in humble submissiveness before God as final judge....

"The second part of the appeal is directed to the strong (14:13-15:6).... The more liberal should recognize the scruples of the more conservative and respect them as true brothers and sisters in the Lord. Just as the more conservative must truly accept and not condemn the more liberal, so the more liberal must truly accept and not despise the more conservative.

"The antidote and antithesis to both diseases is genuine acceptance of and respect for the integrity of the other.... The strong are to welcome those who are weak in faith, 'though not with a view to settling disputes' (14:1). The zeal of the liberals to instruct and 'enlighten' their more conservative fellow Christians has to be curbed.... If the more conservative should not beat others over the head with their scruples, neither should the more liberal constantly push their liberal views and practice in front of the more conservative.

"So too in verse 14, having stated

his own conviction about clean and unclean, Paul adds, 'but to the one who reckons something unclean, to that person it is unclean.' And he goes on to recognize that such convictions can be so deeply rooted that a brother might be 'deeply upset on account of food,' might indeed be 'destroyed' by someone's more liberal practice on food matters (14:15-16).

"Paul here clearly wants to inculcate in his readers a genuine sensitivity to and sympathy for the conservative minority. He recognizes that they are in a real and not merely imaginary danger. Without their intending it to be so, the conduct of the liberal majority might be deeply hurtful and genuinely damaging to those whose identity was still largely shaped by Jewish traditional convictions and customs.

"So integral to covenant loyalty had been the practice of food laws that Christian Jews could still feel themselves excluded from the covenant, cut off from grace by disobedience at this point. In classic liberal terms, Paul pleads with his own passion for the right of the more conservative to continue to maintain their conservative views and to be accepted as they are....

"The more liberal must take into account not only their own convictions in determining their actual conduct, but also the way their conduct affects their more conservative fellow Christians. The pattern here is Christ [15:3]: he adapted his own freedom and conduct to the needs of his neighbour; he did not seek simply to please himself....

"It is precisely the strong whom Paul reminds that 'the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (14:17).... The point is that liberty cuts both ways—if it is genuine liberty, it is liberty both to observe the food laws, and liberty from the food laws.... The true test of the liberal's

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Update

NEWS OF PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS

Deaf members going to South Africa

U.S. and Canadian deaf members, interpreters, hearing signers and their families are invited to join a group traveling to South Africa for the Feast to visit deaf members on the Wild Coast. Contact WCG Travel by mail at 169 S. St. John, Pasadena, California, 91129, or call (TDD) 1-800-321-4892 to receive a tour description.

Singles activities

SPRINGFIELD, Missouri—

Springfield singles invite singles to attend their third annual spring dance weekend March 31 to April 2.

Sabbath services will feature guest speaker **Dean Blackwell**. A formal dance and buffet dinner will take place that evening at the Radisson Inn. Sunday's activities will feature a buffet breakfast and seminar conducted by Mr. Blackwell.

Cost for the weekend is \$35 with a deadline for payment of March 18. Make check payable to Local Church Activity Fund and mail it along with your name, address, church area, telephone number and gender to **Larry Harmon**, 2329 Bodeb, Springfield, Missouri, 65802.

The Radisson Inn offers a flat rate of \$52 per room (one to four people). The hotel number is 1-800-333-3333 or 1-417-883-6550. Mention you are with the Worldwide Church of God.

For more information contact Mr. Harmon at 1-417-886-0919 after 6 p.m. *Michael Blackwell*.

SAN ANTONIO, Texas—Escape to the Lost Valley Resort for Memorial Day weekend May 26 to 29.

Activities will include a Friday evening Bienvenidos get-together, Sabbath services with a guest speaker, a coun-

try western Fiesta dance, Sunday brunch, seminar and resort activities such as tennis, swimming, volleyball, basketball, football and golf. Nearby activities include tubing, horseback riding, horse racing and a PRCA rodeo.

The weekend will conclude with a cookout and entertainment. Cost for the one- to three-night stay will range from \$52 to \$97. Call **Karen Jonas** or **Nanette Aguirre** at 1-210-545-5154 or write to them at 15438 Legend Springs, San Antonio, Texas, 78247, by April 1 for a registration packet.

A schedule of events and registration forms will be sent to all Texas churches.

Church anniversary

BALTIMORE, Maryland—The date for the Baltimore church anniversary has been changed to April 22. For more information contact **Matt Stewart**, 3635 Hilmar Rd., Baltimore, Maryland, 21207; telephone 1-410-922-8831.

SEP in Nigeria

JOS, Nigeria—Despite punishing economic conditions in Nigeria, the church was able to accept more than half of the YOU members from each of the church areas for the Summer Educational Program Dec. 18 to 31.

Clearinghouse for job listings

In order to better assist terminated Church employees with their work transition, the Human Resources Department is attempting to establish a clearinghouse of job openings at all levels and in all industries: management, professional, manufacturing, service, trainee and intern positions.

Because many of you work for large corporations and have access to information regarding the needs, hiring practices and job openings of your employer, we ask for your help. We would appreciate any job market information you might have or any information regarding government or private industry training and educational programs in your area. Because we have a limited staff, we would ask that classified ads and newspaper clippings not be sent. Information suitable to put into a binder or post on a bulletin board (such as company listings and program brochures) are preferable.

No information of this sort is unimportant, and God will surely bless our efforts.

Please send information to Leigh Sniffen or Jamie Johnson Lang at Worldwide Church of God, Human Resources—Job Clearinghouse, 300 W. Green St., Pasadena, California, 91129, fax 1-818-584-9614.

If you have any questions, please call us at 1-818-304-6100 or 1-800-266-4461, Ext. 6100; e-mail: COMPUSERVE: WCG-Job Club 75457,432.

A non-Church youth, the son of the government head in the district where the camp is located, was also accepted. Some of the married staff served as dorm parents and some of the singles served as dorm brothers and sisters.

As camp drew to a close, it became increasingly difficult to keep up with the boiling and filtering of lake

water for drinking and cooking.

Until we solve our water problem and buy a good generator or get connected to the national electric grid, the numbers we can accept will probably continue to drop because of financial constraints. We are looking to God for his intervention on behalf of the youths he loves so much. *Joseph Forson*.

Unclean: our responsibility to other Christians

Continued from page 11

liberty is whether he is willing to restrict it; only when it is liberty to deny oneself and not just liberty to please oneself can it be counted Christian liberty. Where the fundamental principle of faith does not point to a clear course of conduct, then it is love of neighbour which must shape the practice of liberty....


"The danger to the conservative arises not merely from seeing the liberal doing something of which the conservative disapproves, but from being forced (by example or social pressure) to act against his or her convictions—the damage in view is not that of being offended by *other*

people's eating unclean food, but that of *actually eating unclean food themselves* despite all their doubts and convictions. Paul, in other words, has no intention of encouraging the weak to exercise undue pressure on their own behalf—to blackmail the strong by professing grief or hurt at the conduct of the strong. For liberty to be seriously curtailed, it would not be sufficient that the more conservative disapprove of the more liberal; Paul has in mind only situations where the conservatives' trust in God is actually undermined.... In calling for the more liberal to condition their liberty by sensitive concern for the more conservative, Paul does not mean that they should abandon their liberty altogether....

"Christian freedom ... is nothing if it is not freedom to love the neighbour, warts and all, differences and all. Only such liberty, growing from faith and expressed through love, is sufficient to sustain true community" (James D.G. Dunn, *Christian Liberty: A New Testament Perspective*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994, pp. 83-105).

Also of note is a paragraph by Jerry Bridges: "What about those areas in which Christians differ in their convictions as to God's will? Paul speaks to this question in Romans 14, where he takes up the problem of eating certain food. He lays down three general principles to guide us. The first is that we should not judge those whose convictions are different from ours (verses 1-4). The second principle is

that whatever our convictions are, they must be 'to the Lord,' that is, developed out of a sense of obedience to Him (verses 5-8). The third principle is that whatever convictions we have developed as 'to the Lord,' we must be true to them (verse 23). If we go against our convictions, we are sinning, even though others may have perfect freedom in that particular thing" (Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1978, p. 93).

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2 *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says: "It seems that in the mind of this writer the distinction between clean and unclean animals was intended for sacrifices only: for in the following chapter he makes God say: 'Everything that moveth shall be food for you' (Gen. ix. 3)" ("Clean and Unclean Animals," vol. 4, p. 110).

3 Some plants are poisonous, of course, but God did not describe which are. He allowed humans to discern which plants are good. Likewise, some animals are not good for food. God allowed Noah and his descendants to discern which were good for food. See also footnote 5.

4 Years later, Ezekiel criticized the Levitical priests for their failure to teach the people the difference between the clean and the unclean. They were failing to do their duty under the old covenant—failing to discern leprous from nonleprous and failing to discriminate against those who had touched corpses and people with discharges. A similar criticism was given by Malachi: The people and priests were giving defective offerings.

Ezekiel predicted a time when the priests would do their duty, teaching the difference between clean and unclean (44:23). But in his

prophecies of correct worship, he also included sacrifices (20:40; 45:17) and a requirement for circumcision (44:9).

Criticism of Levitical priesthood functions and millennial prophecies cannot be used to tell us which practices are appropriate today.

5 *The Jewish Encyclopedia* defines Noahian laws as "laws which were supposed by the Rabbis to have been binding upon mankind at large even before the revelation at Sinai, and which are still binding upon non-Jews.... They declared that the following six commandments were enjoined upon Adam: (1) not to worship idols; (2) not to blaspheme the name of God; (3) to establish courts of justice; (4) not to kill; (5) not to commit adultery; and (6) not to rob.... A seventh commandment was added after the Flood—not to eat flesh that had been cut from a living animal.... He who observed the seven Noahian laws was regarded as a domiciled alien...as one of the pious of the Gentiles, and was assured of a portion in the world to come" ("Laws, Noahian," vol. 7, pp. 648-9). Talmudic references are *Aboda Zara* 64b and *Sanhedrin* 56ab; see also *Sibylline Oracles* 4:24-34.

6 The Louw and Nida lexicon lists *koinos* as a synonym of *akathartos*, saying: "It is pos-

sible that there is some subtle distinction in meaning, particularly on a connotative level, between *koinos* and *akathartos* in Ac 10.14, but it is difficult to determine the precise differences of meaning on the basis of existing contexts. The two terms are probably used in Ac 10.14 primarily for the sake of emphasis." Such repetition, using similar words or phrases, was a common Jewish form of emphasis.

7 Even though we taught that unclean meats were only a physical matter or a "physical sin," a matter of health, it was also understood as a spiritual sin if people lusted after foods the Church said were forbidden. Wrong attitudes come from within and can defile a person. Rules about unclean meats were enforced for many years.

However, some Christians did not believe that the prohibition was biblically correct. They felt that the Church should not prohibit something that the Bible does not prohibit. This is what the Church did in the case of alcohol. Despite alcohol's proven potential for problems—health and social problems far greater than whatever may be caused by pork and shrimp—the Church has never felt that it was authorized to forbid alcohol, because the Bible does not forbid it.

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