

Clean and Unclean Laws (Kosher Law)

Introduction

The kosher laws fall into two separate topics,

- Foods themselves and
- Cross Contamination

Because these two topics are characteristically so different it is necessary to deal with each separately, hence this paper is presented in two parts,

- Part 1: What is Kosher today
- Part 2: Clean and Unclean

Part 1: What is Kosher Today?

The Difficulty of Kosher

It is more difficult today to ensure observance of the kosher laws than many may realise. Whilst it is easy not to eat that which YHWH has declared unclean because He has been very specific, our current situation is confounded because many apparently clean items can contain extract from what is unclean. For example, cheese having animal rennet may contain pig rennet, shell fish extract can be found in some salad dressings and some pharmaceutical products have unacceptable ingredients such as shark extract (sharks do not have scales and are therefore unclean). However, the issue extends far beyond these simple examples.

Food Offered to an Idol

The apostle Paul discusses this topic in chapter 8, the emphasis is mine,

So then, concerning the eating of food offered to idols, we know that an idol is no matter (has no power, no authority) at all in the world, and that there is no other Elohim but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth – as there are many gods and many masters, for us there is one Elohim, the Father, from whom all came and for whom we live, and one Master Yahusha Mashiach, through whom all came and through whom we live. (1Cor.8:4-6)

But look to it, lest somehow this right of yours..... 1Cor.8:9)

The apostle is confirming that a knowledgeable believer knows that an idol in itself has neither power nor authority: it is man alone that attaches power to an idol. Knowing this, a knowledgeable believer can in himself be comfortable eating food that has been dedicated to an idol because he knows such a dedication is meaningless and we are told not to fear idols (2Kings 17:37-38). Hence Paul's comment 'this right of yours' in verse 9, but what of the phrase 'but look to it?' There are conditions to this 'right.'

1. When the food is offered to an idol in the presence of a believer.
If a believer (knowledgeable or not), eats food that has been dedicated to an idol in his presence it could be construed as condoning the dedication and acceptance of it.
2. When in the presence of a new believer.
A knowledgeable believer should not eat food offered to an idol in the presence of a new believer because it would give the impression that it is acceptable to acknowledge the credibility of idols. This is the point made in verses 7, 9 and 10 below,

However, not all have this knowledge (that an idol has no power). But some, being aware of the idol, until now eat it as having been offered to an idol, so their conscience, being weak, is defiled. (1Cor.8:7).

But look to it, lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling-block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's place, shall not his conscience, if he is weak, be built up to eat food offered to idols? (1Cor.8:9-10)

A new believer has less understanding and seeing a person well versed in Torah eating food that has been dedicated to an idol, may conceive this as Torah permitting believers to acknowledge the legitimacy of idols, in contravention of Acts 15:20. Thus as Paul says in verse 7, the beginner's faith (conscience) is weak (through ignorance) and the beginner becomes defiled (under a misconception). For this reason knowledgeable believers must conduct themselves in a manner that will not mislead (be a stumbling block to) new believers. Note Acts 15 is directed specifically at new believers.

I have skipped past verse 8 and for good reason. This verse is a strange interjection interrupting the flow of the discussion from verse 7 which is subsequently continued in verses 9 and 10. So let's have a look at verse 8,

But food does not commend us to Elohim, for we are none the better if we eat, nor any worse for not eating. (1Cor.8:8).

This verse is confusing until it is realised that the apostle is talking about kosher eating. In Jewish thought food refers to kosher foods. Verse 8 seems to be tangential to the issue because the apostle is here highlighting that it is not eating that accredits a person in the eyes of YHWH. A person can still be accredited righteous by Yahuwah whether he eats food or not, as in fasting for example.

Now let us consider chapter 10,

But that what the Gentiles (pagan Gentiles) sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to Elohim. And I would not that you should be associates of demons. You cannot drink the cup of Mashiach and the cup of demons; and you cannot be partakers at the table of Mashiach and at the table of demons. (1Cor.10:20-21)

In my opinion the apostle is here referring to a pagan dedication spoken in the presence of a believer. Otherwise the verse would take away the 'right' spoken of in 1Cor. 8:9. Continuing with chapter 10,

*Whatever is sold in the meat market you eat without an enquiry on account of conscience. For the earth belongs to YHWH in its fullness. And if one of the pagans invites you and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you, without an enquiry on account of conscience. But if anyone will say to you "This meat is derived from a sacrifice" don't eat it, for the sake of him who told you. **But why is my freedom judged of by the conscience of others.** If I by grace partake, why am I reproached for that for which I give thanks? If you therefore eat, or if you drink, or if you do anything, do all things to the glory of YHWH. (1Cor.10:25-31).*

This passage is continuing the topic from chapter 8 – food offered to idols and covers two separate situations. The first is purchasing meat in the meat market and the second is sharing a meal with a pagan Gentile that has been dedicated to an idol.

1. Concerning food purchased in the market.

The apostle is explaining that however the food is prepared the preparation has no hold over you because you know there is only one Elohim; Yahuwah and all food (kosher food) is provided by him. Thus there is no need to enquire about the meat. If you are unable to trace the path of the animal from its owner to the meat market it is just as acceptable as when you are able to trace its chain of custody: untraceable meat is as acceptable as traceable meat.

2. Eating with Pagans.

If you are told that the food was sacrificed to an idol, even though you could still eat it because you know that such a sacrifice possesses no power over you, you should not eat it so as to

demonstrate to others, insofar as you are concerned the idol to which the food was sacrificed is false and you do not support the dedication.

Thus the only time a believer should refrain from eating food offered to an idol is when such participation could be misinterpreted by others. Insofar as the believer himself is concerned he knows that the only sacrifices that have any value are those made in the name of Yahuwah, all other sacrifices are worthless and have no effect on him.

Concerning the sentence in red *But why is my freedom judged of by the conscience of others?* Paul is speaking as a knowledgeable believer and playing devil's advocate. Why should he as a knowledgeable believer live a life of restraint (in respect of foods offered to an idol) for the sake of others, when all food he partakes of he has dedicated to YHWH. Paul is not here referring to a particular event as with the former verses he is talking about the general lifestyle of a knowledgeable believer. Finally in this section consider what is said in 1Tim.4,

*But the Ruach says explicitly that, in the latter times, some will depart from the faith and will go after deceptive spirits and after the doctrine of demons. These (people) will seduce by a false appearance and will speak a lie and will be seared in their conscience. And will forbid to marry **and will require abstinence from meats (Kosher meats) which Elohim has created for use and for thankfulness by them who believe and know the truth. Because whatever is created by Elohim is good and there is nothing that should be rejected if it be received with thankfulness, for it is sanctified by the Word of Elohim and prayer. If you elucidate these things on your brothers, you will be a good minister of Yahusha HaMashiach, being educated in the language of the faith and in the good doctrine which you have been taught.** (1Tim.4:1-6).*

In his words to Timothy Paul is merely reiterating what he has said on this topic in chapters 8 and 10. Kosher meat (clean animals), even that offered to idols is acceptable because we do not accredit idols, only Yahuwah. By default it could be said that not to eat food offered to an idol is accrediting the idol with authority. HOWEVER IT IS PARAMOUNT TO DEDICATE ALL FOOD TO YAHUWAH, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT HE ALONE IS THE PROVIDER AND GIVE THANKS TO HIM FOR HIS PROVISION BEFORE EATING. This is the only genuine sanctification. As the apostle says in verse 31 above, do all things (including eating) to the glory of Elohim.

The Necessity for Praying Over Meals

In my opinion a believer may eat any kosher food on two conditions; 1) he must be aware how his actions will affect others and 2) He must eat to the glory of the Father. This requires the sanctification of each meal and for those who may be unsure of what to pray I can suggest the following as a guide,

Baruch atah YHWH Eloheinu Melekh HaOlam (Blessed are you YHWH Elohim king of the ages)
Abba YHWH we give thanks to you for being the provider of our daily needs
And for this food that is before us now.
We dedicate this food to you as the true provider thereof
And ask for your blessing over this meal.

Conclusion to Part 1

There is a lot of sensationalism, even scaremongering about observance of the kosher laws. Paul's words in 1Cor.10:25 - *Whatever is sold in the meat market you eat without an enquiry on account of conscience*, is clearly not an accusation rather it is an instruction. If it were an accusation not an instruction it would have necessitated either an exclamation mark or question mark at the end of the sentence. Also if it were an exclamation or question it would conflict with what the apostle's says elsewhere. I feel the apostle is not chastising the Corinthian community with these words but giving guidance on how they should observe the kosher laws. We must be careful that we do not travel the same road as the orthodox and make Torah observance unnecessarily difficult and burdensome.