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Are All Things Clean? – Mark 7

Mark 7:18-19 (ESV)

Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

Mark 7:19 is often cited in defense of Yeshua making all food clean.

We do agree that all food is clean. If something isn't biblically clean, then it cannot be food; being clean is a requirement for something to be considered food. This is a point often ignored; not all things are food.

Let's dig a little deeper for a moment.

The context of the events occurring in Mark 7 surround a man-made ritual of washing ones hands and saying certain prayers while doing it, before eating. We get this from the context set by the verses from the beginning of chapter 7.

Mark 7:1-5 (ESV)

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

The previous verses make it clear that the Pharisees were not concerned about the food being eaten, but rather it was that the disciples had not washed their hands “according to the tradition of the elders”. Their concern is the tradition of the elders and the handwashing, not what the Torah states.

In fact, Yeshua had a problem with the Pharisees having a problem here; he called them out as teachers who teach man-made doctrines, not God's Word. Yeshua even states that they have left the commands of God behind and, instead, hold to their own traditions.

Mark 7:6-13 (ESV)

And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

“‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”

And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

Clearly the Messiah disagreed with the practices of the Pharisees and the fact that they were more concerned about their hand-washing tradition than the commands of God. It is important to note, however, that there is still no new context brought into the text.

The context of the discussion is still about following the hand-washing tradition of man, not the definition of what is food.

Before we move on to the next part of the text, we need to find out a little more about the tradition of hand washing.

According to the Jewish Virtual Library,

“The washing of hands is required before eating a meal at which bread is served. One reason for hand washing is purely mundane: to clean them before eating. The origin of this law, however, is biblical (Exodus 30:17-21). Moses was commanded to make a copper laver and to place it at the entrance to the alter area so that Aaron and his sons could wash their hands before approaching the alter to offer sacrifices. Verse 20 concludes, “. . .and it shall be for them a statute forever.” The washing of hands makes them ritually pure. This symbolic expression of washing away impurity from one's hands dates back to Temple times, when the Priests (Kohanim), as described above with Aaron, devoted their lives to the Temple and its sacrificial system. Before performing any ritual, a Kohein was required to wash his hands, making himself pure and ready to offer a sacrifice.

When the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the table in a home came to represent the Temple alter. The bread placed on it symbolizes the offerings that were once brought to the Priests. The Sages, who believed that the Temple and the Priesthood would be restored, did not want the practice of washing hands before handling an offering or performing a ritual to be forgotten, and so washing the hands before a meal was strictly enforced. Today, Orthodox and traditional Jews still wash their hands before eating bread.”

("Jewish Practices and Rituals - Hand Washing" as found at https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Hand_Washing.html)

According to their website, their source was a book titled "The Second Jewish Book of Why" by Alfred Kolatch. (Kolatch, Alfred J. The Second Jewish Book of Why. Jonathan David Publishers, Inc.; Middle Village, New York, 1985)

Interestingly enough, a Karaite Jew raised Orthodox Jew named Nehemiah Gordon agrees with this understanding, but cites the story in Matthew 15 instead. Here is what he had to say:

*"In Matthew 15 the disciples sat down to eat bread without washing their hands in accordance with ancient Jewish tradition. Seeing this, the Pharisees approached Yeshua with an accusation: "Why do your disciples transgress the **tradition of the elders**? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread" (v.2). Yeshua responded: "Why do you also transgress the **commandment of God** by your tradition?" (v.3).*

When most "bible-believing Christians" read this they are convinced that Jesus is setting them free from the "bondage" of the Torah. The old covenant required a ritual washing of the hands before eating, but Jesus came and set Christians free from this ritual. ...

...If Yeshua did not come to do away with even one jot or tittle of the Law, why did he defend his disciples when they ate food without washing their hands? To answer this question we must first determine where the Torah commands washing the hands before eating. Actually there is no such commandment in the Torah! This is surprising because when Orthodox Jews wash their hands they make the blessing, "Blessed art thou Lord, king of the universe, who has... commanded us to wash the hands."

Why would Orthodox Jews all over the world and throughout history bless God for commanding them to wash their hands when no such commandment can be found in the Torah? I was raised as a religious Orthodox Jew and this is a question I asked my Orthodox rabbis when I was growing up. My rabbis explained to me that the obligation to wash the hands is an enactment instituted by the Rabbis more than 2000 years ago. They explained further that the "Oral" Torah commands us to obey the Rabbis and by obeying the Rabbis we are indirectly obeying God. So the blessing that God commanded us to wash our hands is really a declaration of our obedience to the God-given authority of the Rabbis to enact new commandments.

To someone uninitiated in Orthodox Judaism this may sound incredible. But the key to understanding this is the ancient Pharisee concept of "Oral" Torah. Orthodox Jews believe that during the 40 days and 40 nights Moses was on Mt. Sinai he was given a second Torah that was to be transmitted orally. The belief in this Oral Torah (also called Oral Law) is the basic doctrine that defines modern Orthodox Jews and ancient Pharisees alike (Babylonian Talmud, Sabbath 31a; Josephus Flavius, Antiquities of the Jews 13.10.6)."

(Nehemiah Gordon. In Search of the Hebrew Roots: Phariseism or Biblical Judaism.
http://www.hebrewyeshua.com/in_search_of.html)

Did all of this help to clear up the hand-washing tradition and why the Pharisees thought it was so important to begin with? To the Pharisees, the hand-washing tradition was very important; it was so important that they put their traditions above the actual Word of God.

The Pharisees were so rigid in their traditions, that if Yeshua and His disciples were breaking the dietary instructions of the Creator, they would have called it out. However, they were not concerned about what was being eaten; neither was Yeshua.

Let's go on to the rest of the context of Yeshua's statement in Mark 7.

Mark 7:14-23 (ESV)

And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" **(Thus he declared all foods clean.)** And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

This section continued with Yeshua explaining how the hand-washing tradition has no authority; it has no authority over the Law of God. Man's traditions cannot make something clean or unclean, only the Law of God can do that.

As we have seen from the context of the verses surround Mark 7:19, the question has nothing to do with eating something that is not already understood by the Jewish Pharisees to be considered food. They were not talking about eating something that is unclean according to the Torah; they were talking about how their actions would make something that God said is clean for food to be unclean.

Yeshua said it is not what goes into the mouth that makes a man unclean; in other words, "Not washing your hands does not make what is called clean food by God, now unclean."

When this is pointed out, some will then argue that the Bible says plainly, "thus he declared all foods clean"; we agree that all food is clean.

Historically, man's definition of what is food extends beyond what YHWH said we can eat. For example, many eat rabbit, pork, and shellfish among other things, considering it food. However, since when does man's culture override the command of the Creator?

YHWH defined food for us; all He defined as food is what we should eat. When we go beyond those parameters, we are making ourselves gods and putting our wants, desires, and rules above those of YHWH. If Yeshua stated that all food is clean, it is with the "Biblical" understanding of what food is, not what society has deemed to be good for eating.

You may have noted that we just said "If Yeshua stated" because those words in Mark 7:19 are not found in the oldest manuscripts; you will find a footnote relating to that statement in most of the Bibles quoting it.

If we examine texts prior to 1899, we find this to be true. Here are a several of many examples.

Mark 7:19 - Geneva Bible 1599

Because it entered not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught which is the purging of all meats?

Mark 7:19 - Young's Literal Translation (from 1862, revised in 1887 and 1898)

because it doth not enter into his heart, but into the belly, and into the drain it doth go out, purifying all the meats.'

Mark 7:19 – Authorized King James Version (1769 version of the 1611 KJV)

because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?

Mark 7:19 – 1611 King James Version

Because it entreth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?

It's quite possible and maybe even likely, that in later translations those words were added in by the translators; they were making their own determination about what Yeshua was talking about. We cover this more in depth in many of our teachings including "[*Can We Eat All Things: 1 Timothy 4*](#)".

In conclusion, the common teaching that Yeshua made all things clean does not fit the context of the passage. Instead, what we see is Yeshua revealing a great truth here; there is nothing we can do to change the word of God. Yahweh declared what is clean to eat; nothing man can do will change it. Whether our hands are clean or dirty, food is still food and non-food remains not food.

We hope that this teaching has blessed you.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

For Additional Study on topics relating to all things being clean, please see our teachings:

[Acts 10: Peter's Vision](#)

[Can We Eat All Things? 1 Timothy 4](#)

[Pauline Paradox Part 5: Romans](#)

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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