

# Should I Keep Kosher?

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

Much has been written about why the Lord gave Israel laws separating the clean from unclean, the holy from the unholy, generally categorized in Judaism as the “laws of Kashrut.” Interesting, the Lord’s categorization predates the Mosaic Law, as it is written, “*You [Noah] shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that are unclean, a male and his female*” (Genesis 7:2, NKJV).<sup>i</sup>

Some attribute the laws of Kashrut to health and dietary benefits. Indeed, God loves me and, therefore, He cares about what I eat? However, that would be like comparing the religious ceremony of hand washing before a meal to our everyday sanitization practice. I think there is a more profound spiritual significance hidden in the Law.

The laws of Kashrut in practicality have little to do with health. They were derived from the Laws governing the Temple. That is why koshering a metal pot requires it to be scoured with fire and rinsed with water, not placed in a dishwasher. And per the Law, ceramic and porcelain (earthen) cookware must be shattered.<sup>ii</sup>

Under Jewish Law, called *Chalakah*,<sup>iii</sup> Gentiles are prohibited from touching an open bottle of wine. In doing so, they render the whole bottle non-kosher and unclean. Gentiles are also forbidden from exclusively preparing bread or other bread-related products. Unlike wine, they can participate in the preparation but cannot own the bakery lest they render the products unclean.

So, why these prohibitions? Because wine and bread were both used in the Temple, particularly the Temple sacrifices. And I chose these two elements for a specific reason. Yeshua also used both when He officiated the New Covenant with His disciples. And both are universally accepted by the church, which includes the Gentiles, as communion elements.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the Lord detailed the laws of separation or sanctification. For example, any animal flesh that touches something unclean shall not be eaten but burned with fire.<sup>iv</sup> Anything dead is unclean, and anything that touches it is also rendered unclean.<sup>v</sup> And those with Leprosy or other discharges, including women during their menstrual cycles, are likewise unclean.<sup>vi</sup>

To be made clean or become sanctified required immersion in a *Mikvah* (a sanctification pool). Or it required the priest in the Temple to make a sin offering, as it is written, *"Then the priest shall offer the sin offering, and make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Afterward he shall kill the burnt offering"* (Leviticus 14:19).

The five books of Moses, called the Chumash (five), also called the Torah, meaning "instruction," were given to Israel for a purpose. We read, *"It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses"* (Leviticus 10:9-11).

Israel was not just required to learn about the clean and the unclean. They were instructed to practice its separation as well. Therefore, under strict rabbinic law, the Jewish people were not only prohibited from intermarrying with their surrounding Gentile nations, they were also required to remain separate from them. Edicts for Gentile impurity, as it is called, were issued shortly before the first Jewish war against Rome.<sup>vii</sup>

The reason for these edicts is debated. However, what remains clear is that the Apostle Peter was aware of them when he received his infamous vision from the Lord. It is written, *"You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean"* (Acts 10:28).

Peter broke with Jewish Law when he visited Cornelius. For this reason, it is unquestionable that the vision given to Peter of the unclean animals descending from heaven was a direct reference to the Gentiles.<sup>viii</sup> Some argue the Laws of Kashrut remain in effect for the Jewish people despite this correlation. However, I believe the Law of Moses was not only given for instruction; it was given for its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

This is a complex area to navigate. Christ is the fulfillment of every Law, and in fact, He is the embodiment of God's Law, which is both eternal and ultimately binding on all humanity. For example, regarding the Sabbath, God gave His instruction to Israel. Even though Christ is our eternal Sabbath, we know that observance of the Sabbath is an everlasting ordinance, for it is written, *"It is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever"* (Leviticus 16:31).

At the Council in Jerusalem, the Apostles discussed whether it was necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and command them to keep the Law of Moses, specifically as a requirement for salvation. The unequivocal answer was "no" for the Gentiles, but "yes" for the Jews as Paul had Timothy circumcised. It is written, *"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality"* (Acts 15:28-29).

However, should we as Jews continue to practice and observe the laws of Kashrut? Well, I think that depends. Paul said, *"He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down*

*the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross..." (Ephesians 2:14-16).*

Paul has articulated that God's law of commandments contained in ordinances given to Israel created a separation, meaning sanctification from her surrounding Gentile nations. Now the Gentiles have been made clean through the blood of Christ, as it is written, *"Even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles"* (Romans 9:24).

And Peter spoke to the household of Cornelius, saying: *"In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him... [And] While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God"* (Acts 10:34-35, 44-46).

God's Law of sanctification regarding the Gentiles has been fulfilled in Christ. For this reason, it would be inappropriate for any Jewish person to reject their food unless it has been offered to idols, contains blood, or has been strangled. As it is written, *"For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer"* (1 Timothy 4:4-5). If the Gentiles have been cleansed and made holy through the blood of Christ, then their food is also clean.

Paul said, *"If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you, This was offered to idols, do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness. Conscience, I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?"* (1 Corinthians 10:27-29).

As an interesting side note, some rabbis claim that the world will be purified in the Messianic age, achieving a higher spiritual level where even pigs will become permissible food.<sup>ix</sup> Yes, when Yeshua returns, we'll all be eating BBQ pork. And I am hoping that lobster and scallops make it on the list as well.

This rabbinic opinion raises another question. Will there be *anything* unclean in the Kingdom of God? I do not believe so, as we read concerning the New Jerusalem, *"There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life"* (Revelation 21:27).

The Gentiles have been grafted into the branches of Israel and have become part of her commonwealth.<sup>x</sup> It is written, *"For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the*

olive tree" (Romans 11:16-17). Them being grafting in, however, did not make the Gentiles Jewish.

Paul further clarified: *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."* (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

Just as it would be inappropriate for a Jewish person to reject the food of our Gentile brothers, it would also be wrong for us to force our Jewish brethren to break from their conviction to keep the Laws of Kashrut. So, regarding our initial question: Should we as Jews continue to practice and observe the laws of Kashrut, and should Christians do so as well. I think that depends on our company. Like Paul said, *"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all. To the Jews, I observed the law, that I might win some of them to Christ; and to the Gentiles, I observed their customs, so that I might win some of them to Christ as well."*

Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

<sup>ii</sup> Leviticus 6:28.

<sup>iii</sup> *Chalakah* in Hebrew means "the path" or "the way." It comes from the Hebrew word *chalak* (to walk), and refers to the collective body of Jewish Law, including Biblical Law, Talmudic and Rabbinic Law, as well as other Jewish customs and traditions. JewishEncyclopedia.com.

<sup>iv</sup> Leviticus 7:19.

<sup>v</sup> Leviticus 11:32.

<sup>vi</sup> Leviticus 13:59.

<sup>vii</sup> Klawans, Jonathan. *Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism*. Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Association for Jewish Studies.

<sup>viii</sup> Acts 10:9-15.

<sup>ix</sup> Kaminker, Mendy. *Pigs & Judaism – Deep Revulsion, but a Promising Future*. Chabad.org.

<sup>x</sup> Ephesians 2:12.