

## **Study Guide #20: The Biblical Diet**

### **Introduction**

We introduced the subject of food in Explorer II, Study Guide #15 by focusing on the issue of clean and unclean meats. It would be helpful to read that Study Guide before reading this one because in this Study Guide, we largely examine the *objection* texts to the Biblical teaching of the clean and unclean meats, as well as alcohol.

### **Question #1: Is there a spiritual issue regarding what a Christian eats, drinks, wears, talks, and how he acts?**

**Answer:** Yes. Most modern Christians' lifestyles aren't that different from the secular lifestyles, in large part because our sinful nature gives us an inward inclination to go our own way and to resent restrictions on us from any source. A second reason is that we are all social creatures, and most people naturally don't want to be very different from others around them. Nevertheless, Christians should remember that our bodies don't actually belong to us, but to God, for they are the body-temples of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Therefore, **"whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"** (I Corinthians 10:31, NKJV). This means being a Christian involves the *whole* person, with nothing excluded from being dedicated to God's glory.



The Glory of God

### **Question #2: What did Paul mean when he wrote that "food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse" (I Corinthians 8:8, NKJV)?**

**Answer:** This statement was made in the context **"concerning the eating of things offered to idols"** (v. 4, NKJV). Therefore, it has nothing to do with the issue of clean versus unclean meats and can't be used to assert that Christians can eat anything they want to.

### **Question #3: What 3 objection passages to the laws of clean and unclean meats have we already answered in previous Study Guides?**

**Answer:** In previous Study Guides, we have addressed the following 3 objections to the clean and unclean meats issue:

- **Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)**—See Explorer II, Study Guide #17 for why its decision had nothing to do with the Levitical laws concerning clean and unclean meat.
- **Romans 14**—See Explorer II, Study Guide #19 for the evidence that Paul’s counsel here has nothing to do with the Levitical laws concerning clean and unclean meat.
- **Colossians 2:16**—See Explorer II, Study Guides #16 and #19 for the evidence that this passage concerns false teachers’ manmade regulations, not with any Levitical laws. Therefore, whatever is meant by reference to food and drink, it was the false teachers’ rules that were the issue.

#### Question #4: Didn’t Jesus declare that no one is defiled by the meat he eats?

**Answer:** In Mark 7:18-19, Jesus asked the question, “**Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?**” (NKJV). This statement didn’t miraculously change unclean animals into clean ones. *First*, the Greek word for “meats” in the King James’ Version of verse 19 means “foods,” not only meat. *Second*, the issue in this passage concerned ceremonially unclean foods, specifically foods the Pharisees deemed made you ceremonially unclean if you ate them without washing the hands according to their *ceremonial tradition* (Mark 7:2-5, 20-23; cf. Matthew 15:11, 18-20). In other words, the issues are summarized as:

- Not clean meat versus unclean meat, but *food* in general
- Not over *Scripture*, but *Tradition*
- Not *what* you eat, but *how* you eat
- Not *physical* defilement, but *spiritual* defilement

#### Question #5: But didn’t Peter’s vision of the sheet mean we can eat anything?

**Answer:** Peter’s vision, recorded in Acts 10:9-16, was of a sheet containing all kinds of unclean animals, which he was told to “**kill and eat**” (v. 13, NKJV). When Peter protested that he had never eaten unclean animals, the heavenly voice told him that “**What God has cleansed you must not call common**” (v. 15, NKJV). While Peter contemplated the meaning of the vision, visitors arrived and invited him to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile (vv. 17-22). Peter’s visit to Cornelius’ house resulted in Cornelius’ conversion and baptism (vv. 44-48). Then Peter reported that he understood the meaning of the vision—that God was saying that Gentiles weren’t unclean, and that they should be accepted into the Church if they accepted Jesus (v. 28; Acts 11:4-17). For anyone to suggest the vision had a *dual* meaning ignores the context. It’s not kosher (pun intended) to draw a conclusion about something that is not being addressed in the



Peter's Vision of  
Unclean Animals

context.

## Question #6: But didn't Paul say that no one should command believers to abstain from meat because every creature was a good gift from God?

**Answer:** I Timothy 4:3-5 is the passage the question refers to. *First*, note that the foods referred to here are **“foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving”** (v. 3, NKJV). He doesn't say that all creatures were created as foods, but that there are foods that He created for this purpose. There's a big difference. *Second*, the Greek word for **“creature”** in verse 4 means “creation,” so animal foods aren't exclusively the issue here, but food in general. *Third*, the following outline demonstrates the meaning:

- A “foods which God created” (v. 3)
- B “to be received with thanksgiving” (v. 3)
- C “by those who believe and know the truth” (v. 3)
- A<sup>1</sup> “For every creature [creation] of God is good” (v. 4)
- B<sup>1</sup> “and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving” (v. 4)
- C<sup>1</sup> “for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (v. 5)

Note the parallel lines of C and C<sup>1</sup>. They tell us the truth (v. 3) that informs believers that the foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving (v. 3) are found in the word of God (v. 5). It's God's Word that sanctifies (or sets apart) certain foods from those foods that are unacceptable. Therefore, this passage doesn't invalidate the law of clean and unclean meats.

## Question #7: What are the words used in Scripture to denote wine or strong drink, and what does each of them mean?

**Answer:** There are 4 Hebrew words for “wine” or “strong drink” in the Old Testament and 2 Greek words for “wine” in the New Testament, for a total of 6 different Biblical words. All but 1 of them are generic words that could refer to either fermented or unfermented drink. Sometimes the context tells us whether it's fermented or not, but sometimes it doesn't. The Greek word “gleukos” refers only to fresh grape juice. The Hebrew lexicons define the word “shakar” as “strong drink” or “intoxicating drink.” But the Hebrew root is a common root in many languages for the word “sugar.” It was a sweet drink made from non-grape sources, either dates, other fruit, or even grains mixed with honey, and thus it could easily ferment. That it didn't always refer to fermented (alcoholic) drink is evident from the fact that Numbers 28:7 specifies its use at the tabernacle. But Leviticus 2:11 prohibited all leaven to be used at the tabernacle; and the fermentation process is a leavening process. The ancients didn't use distillation to make higher alcohol content beverages, but they *did* know how to prevent the fermentation process. [NOTE: They prevented fermentation by (1) boiling the grape juice into a syrup and then later reconstituting it with water; (2) sealing the grape juice in a container with pitch and then storing it in a cool cistern or pool; or (3) filtering the juice through strainers. They didn't know *why* any of these methods worked because of the lack of scientific knowledge.]



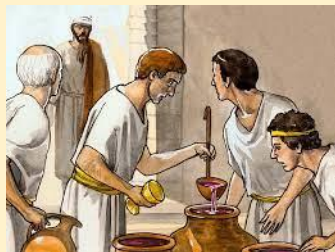
Wine in a Glass

## Question #8: If the context doesn't always tell you whether the drink was fermented or not, how can you make a final judgment about alcohol?

**Answer:** There are 2 reasons we believe that Christians shouldn't drink alcoholic beverages. *First*, there's a consistent pattern in the Old Testament whenever the context does reveal whether the drink was fermented or not. Wine is both commended and condemned in the Old Testament. But with only 1 exception, where the context requires the conclusion that it was fermented, it's condemned, and where it's not fermented, it's commended. This tells us that fermented (alcoholic) beverages are forbidden. *Second*, modern science tells us that numerous diseases are promoted by alcohol use. Moreover, even a small amount begins to affect the frontal lobes of the brain, where the decision-making part of the brain lies. The Christian can hardly endorse something that even a very moderate use will impair one's moral judgments. [NOTE: The 1 exception is Proverbs 31:6-7, which reads, **"Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to those who are bitter of heart"** (NKJV). In Biblical times, alcohol and certain herbal narcotics were the only painkillers. The fact that only the dying and those in severe pain should use alcohol strongly suggests that no one else should.]

## Question #9: Doesn't the fact that Jesus made wine at a wedding feast prove that moderate use of alcohol is acceptable?

**Answer:** John 2:1-11 describes a wedding feast that Jesus attended. When they ran out of wine, Jesus performed a miracle by making wine out of water. After the master of the feast drank some of the new wine, he declared, **"Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now"** (v. 10, NKJV). It's assumed that the



Water changed to Wine

verb **"well drunk"** means the guests were already drunk. So when Jesus made wine, He must have made the same kind of wine. However, this Greek verb is often used in the New Testament with the sense of "freely drinking" without reference to intoxication. This couldn't have been fermented wine for 2 reasons. *First*, if the guests were already drunk, then their taste buds would have been dulled so that no one could tell that Jesus' wine was of better quality. *Second*, if the guests were already drunk, then Jesus would have contributed to an even higher level of intoxication. All Christians agree that Jesus would never do that. Therefore, the wine Jesus made was

unfermented—pure grape juice.

## Question #10: In Ephesians 5:18, Paul commands **"do not be drunk with wine...but be filled with the Spirit"** (NKJV). Doesn't this show that only the *abuse* of alcohol is condemned rather than its moderate use?

**Answer:** Actually, Paul doesn't here make a contrast between excessive and moderate drinking, but rather between the *fullness* of wine and the *fullness* of the Spirit. This contrast puts the emphasis on 2 different sources of fillings. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, one has *no* room for anything else. Therefore, fermented wine is implicitly forbidden in this text.

### Question #11: If Paul said that deacons should “not be given to much wine,” doesn’t that imply that they may drink moderately?

**Answer:** The text the question refers to is I Timothy 3:8. But in verse 3, referring to bishops (vv. 1-2), the literal Greek says that bishops should be “**not near wine**” (NKJV). Then in verse 8, Paul begins with the word “**likewise**,” meaning that his counsel for deacons is the same as it was for bishops. Therefore, Paul isn’t saying that bishops must abstain from alcoholic wine but that deacons may drink moderately. Moreover, verse 11 commands that a deacon’s wife should be “**temperate**,” which comes from a Greek word meaning “abstainers from wine.” So is he really saying that a deacon may drink moderately, but that his wife should be a complete abstainer? Remember that what’s wrong in excess is not necessarily right in moderation. For example, when Peter says that believers no longer run to “**excess of riot**” (I Peter 4:4, KJV), he doesn’t mean that they may riot *moderately*.

### Question #12: What did Paul mean when he told Timothy to drink “a little wine for the stomach’s sake”?

**Answer:** Evidently, Timothy suffered from some type of intestinal problem. For this reason, Paul advised him that he “**no longer drink only water**” (I Timothy 5:23, NKJV), implying that Timothy had avoided all products of the grape like the Nazarites did. In any case, it was only a “**little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities**” (NKJV). Even if he meant fermented wine, this text can’t be properly used to defend moderate social drinking. However, it probably referred to *unfermented* wine because the testimony of ancient history was that *unfermented* wine was preferred for stomach ailments.

### Question #13: Are there any other substances that a Christian should avoid?

**Answer:** Any substance which has a chemical tendency to addict people to it should be avoided by the Christian, for only the Holy Spirit should have control over him. An addiction indicates a degree of loss of free will. That means the believer should avoid tobacco in all its forms, which we also know is associated with numerous deadly diseases. Since caffeine is also addictive, the believer should avoid coffee, most teas, and many sodas. Naturally, the use of recreational drugs and the *abuse* of pharmaceutical medications should also be avoided.



Cigarettes