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OF DAIRY AND MEAT

To an observant Jew, the laws of *kashrus* (kosher) are many and sometimes complex. In spite of their complexity, they serve a purpose. In *This Is My God*, author Herman Wouk points out that the purpose is not medical, contrary to some opinions. Some assume, for instance, that the prohibition against eating pork was because of the diseases that improperly cooked pork could cause. If that were the reason not to eat pork or horse, then the law could simply have required all meats be thoroughly cooked. Rather, Wouk says, the kosher laws were to set the Jewish people apart from their neighbors. Some of the laws have no health component, or any other logical reason for existence, but keeping them shows devotion to the Law.

Many of the laws about what could or could not be eaten, about how to prepare food, and about eating utensils, are clearly spelled out in the Law of Moses. For instance, Leviticus 11 goes into great detail about which animals are “clean” and “unclean.” That same chapter goes into the purification of vessels that have touched something unclean, but it further modified by Numbers 31:21-23.

As detailed as some of these laws are, over time situations came up that had no clear scriptural answer. Sometimes the interpretation can be explained, but is clearly designed as a hedge to keep from violating another law. Such is the requirement that one not eat dairy products and meat in the same meal (sorry, no cheeseburgers or sausage pizza with cheese). The justification for this requirement is, “Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.” (Deut 14:21) Some would ask how you get from there to not mixing any dairy with any meat. The answer is that such a requirement was made to avoid any possibility of the dairy product being from the mother of the meat product. Of course, that would not explain not eating dairy with chicken or fish. Technically, that would not even explain prohibiting beef and dairy, since that law specifies goat meat. To further complicate matters, the interpretation includes time frames. One may not eat a dairy meal (or even a candy bar) within six hours, in most traditions, of a meat meal. One can eat meat immediately after rinsing the mouth and hands after a dairy meal, as long as they are not part of the same meal.

Some rabbis aver that the laws of *kashrus* applied from the beginning (or at least from the flood) and predate

the giving of the Law on Sinai. Those scholars, however, have a difficult time proving that in the case of dairy and meat. Abraham was talking to God and saw some travelers coming. He offered his hospitality to the men. “And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set *it* before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.” (Gen 18:8) Clearly Abraham did not know that he could not serve meat and dairy together. Equally clearly, the laws of *kashrus* applied specifically to the Jewish people after the exodus from Egypt.

Some Christians insist on keeping kosher. Generally this is attributed to the Seventh Day Adventists, but the truth is that a significant portion of Adventists prohibit eating any meat. Some do allow dairy and eggs, while others are strict vegetarians. Some seem to emphasize the prohibition of pork, but say little, if anything, about the other restricted animals. Most try to justify their position by quoting health issues, even though (as has been seen) the restrictions were not primarily medical. Some of these Christians are put into seemingly contradictory positions. The kosher laws (which all relate, incidentally, to animal flesh) would be part of what they call the Ceremonial Law (as opposed to the Moral Law in the Ten Commandments), which they feel they are not obligated to obey, and yet they try to force it on others.

Kashrus may have some health benefits. Its most significant benefit, though, is to establish a separation between the Jewish people and the gentiles. There is absolutely nothing wrong with keeping those laws, and even the rabbinic interpretations. As with circumcision, however, requiring it for those to whom the laws were never given becomes unnecessarily divisive. Paul points us back to Abraham (Galatians and Romans), and Abraham did not keep kosher as it is defined today.

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BEATITUDES, PART 1

Jesus was a preacher. Contrary to popular opinion, that was not his primary mission. His words are not nearly as important as his death and resurrection. Nevertheless, what he had to say has great value. Much of what he taught was specific to the Jewish people to whom he spoke, but many of the principles and statements continue to apply to his gentile followers as well.

Perhaps his best-known sermon is what we call the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). And perhaps the best-known part of that sermon is what is called the Beatitudes. There are some scholars who believe that what Matthew wrote is actually a compilation of several of his sermons, rather than one specific incident. If it is one sermon, some of what he said he repeats in other teaching situations. If it is a compilation, the Beatitudes probably stand as an individual and complete section of teaching; they go together.

The theme of his teaching, especially in what we call chapter 5, appears to be that whatever the people had been told by the scribes (rabbis, lawyers), there was another way of looking at the scriptures that was more basic. A simple reading of the scriptures is simple.

The Beatitudes were nothing new. Some of them were stated one way or another in the scriptures already.

Only when we realize
how great was the need
do we realize how great
was the gift of salvation.

What seemed new was Jesus' choice of which virtues to emphasize, as they all seem to relate to putting others first.

Poor in Spirit

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:3)

There has been much discussion about what is meant by "poor in spirit." Some of those who do not follow Christ generally take an attitude that a Christian has no spunk. Christians, to them, are a spiritless group, who believe that nothing is fun and everything that looks enjoyable must be avoided. The context does not bear up such an interpretation, although it may be an accurate description of many Christians.

Perhaps a more fortunate translation (if you will pardon the pun) is "needy in spirit." When we realize that we are in need of God, it changes our

whole attitude. We may have seen stories, fictional or otherwise, about rich people who see the plight of the needy for the first time and become more generous. Occasionally we may even hear of those who are poor in the world's goods who are more generous because of their poverty. Such were the Christians of Philippi.

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." (2 Cor 8:1-5)

Our "spirit of neediness" should make us more aware of the needs of others. This is especially true in spiritual matters. We may have much of the riches of this world (as most Americans do), but when we know how much we need the gospel, how much we need God, then we feel the need to teach others about the solution to that need. The truth is that we are sinners in need of a savior; and Jesus alone fills that need. If we have had that need met, we owe it to others to spread the good news of salvation. Only when we realize how great was the need do we realize how great was the gift of salvation. Only when we realize how great was the gift do we realize the need to share it.

To the poor/needy in spirit is the kingdom of heaven. Most of the time, especially in Matthew's gospel, the kingdom of heaven is a reference to the church; rarely is it a reference to heaven. Sometimes it may mean both. While this is one of those cases, perhaps it fits better to understand the benefit of being poor in spirit is an inheritance in Christ's kingdom on earth. Those who understand their need for salvation will inherit that salvation, as evidenced by having their needs met now, as well as in eternity. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved." (Acts 2:47)

Mourners

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." (Matt 5:4)

There are many reasons to mourn. Some people mourn the death of a loved one. Others mourn their own lack of goods or talent. There are even those that mourn being caught in a sin; they don't mourn the sin, just that they were caught. King David, on the other hand, mourned

the sin itself. “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.” (Ps 51:3-4)

Perhaps it is David’s kind of mourning that Jesus is talking about. “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” (2 Cor 7:10) Without lamenting that one is a sinner, one will never come to Christ for salvation. Without such mourning, one will never be comforted (because they feel no need for comfort).

Another option, however, is that Jesus is referring to mourning sin in general, both in oneself and in others. Even among followers of Christ, this mourning seems more rare. Many Christians are sorry for their own sins, but do not mourn when they see sin in others. Others see sin in others, and rather than mourning they gloat; they take pride in being better off than the unrepentant sinner. If this is the mourning to which Jesus referred, though, a Christian will not lord it over the sinner, or rub his sin in his face. Rather, he will show the sinner his error in a spirit of love.

This type of person will be comforted. What is the nature of the comfort? In the latter description of the mourner, the comfort is the realization that in some cases he has been the conduit through which another person has received forgiveness of sins. That kind of comfort can only come to one who mourns. Jonah received no comfort at the forgiveness of Nineveh, because he regretted their salvation. God wanted him to be comforted because there were “more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand” [young children].

If Jesus spoke of mourning over personal sin, then it is appropriate to point out that one of the results of immersion for forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38) is the gift of the Holy Spirit. In John 17, Jesus referred to that Spirit as “the comforter.” The word in that place is a variation of the Greek word Jesus used here. When we mourn that we have sin in our lives, we come to Jesus for forgiveness, and that results in the comforter coming into our lives.

Meek

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt 5:5)

“But the meek shall inherit the earth.” (Ps 37:11)

This beatitude is pretty much a direct quotation from the Psalms. In the Greek of Matthew, meekness means gentleness of spirit. In the Hebrew of the Psalm, the word is sometimes translated as poor, but more often it is interpreted to mean humble. Since Jesus was quoting the psalm, we should probably take his meaning to be the same as in that verse. Humility is what is under consideration.

Moses was the most humble man of his generation. (Num 12:3) Perhaps this is what made him a great leader. People are more inclined to follow a humble

man than one who is overly proud. We laugh at the man who says, “I am not conceited; conceit is a fault, and I have none.” We respect a man who admits his faults, but continues to lead to the best of his ability.

If the Beatitudes are about doing for others, this is a cornerstone of this section. Humility is the virtue that underlies the attitude of looking to another’s interests.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. (Rom 12:10-13)

Putting another’s honor above our own is associated with serving the Lord and one’s brothers. The meek man places himself in an attitude of service, rather than thinking that he deserves to be served. Such meekness is the attitude Jesus tried to instill in his

Jonah received no comfort at the forgiveness of Nineveh.

disciples when he washed their feet on the night he was betrayed. (Jn 13:4-17) He taught the Pharisees (who generally ignored what he said) a parable emphasizing meekness.

When thou art bidden of any *man* to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Lk 14:8-11)

The meek shall inherit the earth. Most likely the better translation is, “the meek shall inherit the land.” That was the intent of the psalmist, and was probably the intent as Jesus spoke to his Jewish disciples. The land promise was core to the descendants of Abraham, which is why there is fighting over the land today. Land inheritance was closely protected in the Law of Moses. The violation of that Law is what ultimately doomed King Ahab, when he had Naboth killed. To those Christians today who are not direct descendants of Abraham, the land promise may not be as important. Nevertheless, the obligation of meekness remains.

Lord willing, we will look at the other verses in this section in coming months.

TWISTED SCRIPTURE

Actions have consequences. Actions even have unintended consequences. This is true even of God. What he intends for mercy may actually be used later against him. This was shown early in man's history.

After Cain murdered his brother, God punished him. However, God was merciful in that punishment. His sentence was that he would be a wanderer in the earth. When Cain complained, "it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me," God even allowed that "whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." (Gen 4:13-15) Of course, Cain's statement was an obvious exaggeration. If "every one that findeth me" means what it appears to mean, Cain is saying that the first person that finds him would slay him, and also the second, third, and subsequent people. But if the first slays him, why would he be worried about "every one." Nevertheless, God showed his great mercy in promising extreme vengeance on anyone who would slay Cain. Nothing wrong with that. God establishes early on that he is a forgiving and gentle God. Cain's father was promised death for eating of the forbidden fruit, but Cain only gets a life sentence for murder. What possible unintended consequence may come of that?

Enter Lamech. A fifth generation descendant of Cain, Lamech obviously was familiar with the family history. He may even have talked with his famous ancestor. If Cain's father lived into the seventh generation (Noah), a protected Cain may have easily lived into his fifth generation. If he lived that long, it is possible that he either met his descendant, or at least knew of him.

As with many people listed in the genealogies of Genesis, we know very little about Lamech. For most

people listed, we know their name, ages when their firstborn was born and when they themselves died, and the names of at least one of their children. Unlike many, we know who Lamech's children were, and what their trades were. But then we also have the unexpected consequence.

And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold. (Gen 4:23-24)

An alternate reading is that he killed "a man for wounding me, and a lad for hurting me." Considering the Jewish way of speaking, it is hard to determine whether he is saying he killed one man or two. What is clear is that he expects God to avenge him eleven times over and above Cain. If the more common reading is true, he believes that he was acting in self-defense, and so is justified in expecting more mercy from God.

Perhaps, though, this can be seen as a common failing among men—a misinterpretation of scripture. He admits to killing a man, or two, and says that if God can be merciful to Cain, he is obviously obligated to be more merciful to Lamech. He gives no justification, just a belief. How many people today twist scriptures to justify their own actions? Even the devil can quote scripture to his own purpose, as he did in tempting Jesus. One hundred fifty years ago, people quoted scripture on both sides of the slavery issue. Today people quote scripture to justify or condemn abortion, homosexual acts, drug use and abuse, and many other things. Perhaps in a way we come by it naturally. Such actions go all the way back to Lamech.

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