

# Fellowship and Food

By Matthew Day

Have you ever thought about how friends and food are related? It seems like an odd comparison (after all, we don't eat our friends), yet even in our everyday life there is a close connection between the two. In the Baptist church I went to several years ago, we always had a fellowship meal at the end of the month. At our congregation in Texas we always had lunch and fellowship before service. At college, when I wanted to spend time with a friend, I always went to lunch with them. As one of my friends said, "I've been thinking. You have to eat, and I have to eat, so maybe we should eat lunch or dinner some time." Sharing a meal together is probably the greatest excuse to spend time with someone. But does the connection go any deeper than that? I think it does.

In Leviticus 11, God gave us laws about what we can and cannot eat. "Clean" and "Unclean" are the English words we use. This certainly seems like a strange commandment. What might seem even stranger, however, is that I believe this is to teach us about how we interact with people. This connection is brought out in Acts 10 (Peter's vision of the sheet). God showed Peter clean and unclean animals. He tested Peter, to see if he could discern the difference. But the test wasn't really about animals. It was about people:

*And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any **person** common or unclean.*

(Acts 10:28 ESV)

I must step back for a moment to make an important point—there are both clean and unclean people in the world. Now, you might argue that this contradicts the Scripture I just quoted from Acts. It certainly seems to, but you must consider the context. The Jewish position was that anyone who was not Jewish was unclean. They judged from appearances. Peter was calling Gentiles unclean based on appearances. Yeshua came against this saying:

*It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person. . . . what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."*

(Matthew 15:11, 18-20 ESV)

The word for defile here is *Koino*—to make common. It is the same root word used in Acts 10 for common. So, we see that a person can be made unclean (Psalm 106:39 states this explicitly). The lesson Peter was learning was that uncleanness comes from the heart, not one's place of birth or outward appearances. This can be further seen in Matthew 18:15-20, where Yeshua gives instructions on how to deal with sinners. As a last resort, the offending brother is to be treated as a "Gentile and a tax collector." In this case Gentile is used to mean someone who does not know the God of Israel—a pagan. They were to be treated as if they were unclean.

In 1 Corinthians 5, we see an excellent example of this. A man in the congregation was accused of sexual immorality. Paul commanded the congregation to expel the immoral brother. He was to be put out of the camp, just like a leper (it isn't coincidence that the word unclean is used to describe leprosy). In fact, Paul goes so far as to say “Do not even eat with such a one” (1 Cor. 5:11). Why? Because he is unclean.

Now we can get back to our picture. The kosher laws are not the only place that food and fellowship are connected. Next we must turn to the altar service. Traditionally, one's table is considered like an altar. The father is the priest in charge of protecting his temple—his family. The altar is the path into the Temple. When an Israelite went up to Jerusalem to sacrifice, he was literally sharing a meal with God. If we take the reverse of that picture, when someone comes into your house to share a meal with you, he is dining at your altar. Be careful who you invite into your home.

This goes even further. To share a meal is like making a covenant. In fact, the word for covenant (B'rit) comes from the root word Barah, meaning “to eat.” Eating together is like a covenant of friendship.

As another interesting note, before I conclude, kosher laws teach us how to tell clean people from unclean people as well. A clean animal is recognized by two marks—one in their feet and one in their inward parts (their “heart”). A clean person is recognized by their clean heart and their straight walk. They love their Father with everything within them and they are obedient to His voice.

I've gone through a lot of pictures, but what are we really supposed to learn from all this? Be careful who you spend your time with. Don't hang out with people whose actions or words make them unclean. Just like the uncleanness of leprosy or the dead (or any kind of uncleanness in Scripture), it is contagious. When we hang out with people who have bad character, that character rubs off on us. If we listen to the speech of those with unclean lips—if we associate with those who have uncircumcised hearts, the same will come out of us. We need to watch what we put into our hearts so that we can control what comes out of them. We need to keep our temples pure.

*Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. . . . Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.*

(Isaiah 52:1,11 ESV)

**Midrash Newsletter**  
**September 2010**