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Why Did God Command Israel Not to Eat Pigs?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why God commanded Israel not to eat pigs if it wasn't an issue of morality and why Jesus said his yoke is easy and his burden is light when we know how difficult it is to take up our cross and fight our sin.

* If the Old Covenant law forbidding the eating of pigs wasn't a matter of morality and isn't part of the New Covenant, why did God command Israel not to eat pigs in the first place?

* It's not easy to take up your cross and fight your sin, so why did Jesus say his yoke is easy and his burden is light?

Transcript

This is Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Cokel and you're listening to Stand to Reason's hashtag STRAsk Podcast. Hello, Greg.

Are you ready for your first question? Sure. This one comes from Jim D. Your YouTube videos entitled Is Pigs Me? Allowed Today or Not, Alan Schleiman explained the change of covenants and how that relates to Mosaic law. However, why did God command Israel not to eat pigs in the first place, especially if these Mosaic laws weren't fundamental to the moral laws? Well, this is another one of those why questions to which we have no answer from God.

So what we're left with is speculation. Now, just to know that Jesus is not a word for God, this declared all foods clean. Okay, because it's not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out is Jesus' reasoning.

There was another purpose for some of these laws, but it did not have to do with moral cleanliness. So there is no moral element to this. Some of these laws were meant clearly to create a kind of cultural dividing wall that kept the Jews distinct in very significant ways from the pagan cultures around them.

And in this distinction could be protected from becoming eclectic in their practices, which many of their practices, even food practices, had to do had to had kind of pagan implications. I actually think this is what the tattoo thing is about. You know, there were pagan things that were involved with having tattoos.

There wasn't anything universally immoral about marking your body with a tattoo, but rather because of this other association. Somebody disagree. That's all right.

But that's my sense. So you've got this purpose. But another purpose might have been health reasons.

And of course, for a long time, pork was a problem, even in modern times because of the kind of worm or whatever that could be transferred. When pigs eat, would eat table stuff and other pork, whatever, that just created a problem, a health problem with some particular kind of, I can't remember the name of it now. I used to know.

But this isn't a problem anymore today because of regulations and stuff like that and how pigs are being fed. So this might have been as a disease preventer or something like that. Now, there is a book out that I saw a long time ago and it said none of these diseases.

That was the title of the book. And as I recall, what the book was about was reflecting on some of the dietary commandments and the health implications for them so that what God was doing was directing their dietary habits to some degree away from things that were dangerous and towards things that were healthy for them. So that could be part of the reason.

I'm not sure. I mean, the question being asked as well, if the dietary law was just for health, or at least some of those pork in particular, then why is it that it was abrogated? And I, you know, I can't answer that. Wouldn't it still be unhealthy to eat pork? And I might just can't answer that.

I don't know. And yes, it would still be unhealthy to eat pork, but you have to ask Jesus when you see him because he didn't make any exceptions. And it might have been there's a greater concern for him about all the cashew or all of the dietary laws.

And so he just was removing all of that. And of course, anticipating the time when the new covenant would come very soon, which needed to be clarified by Paul in Ephesians chapter 2, that what the new covenant did is it provided for the breaking down of that dividing wall that separated the Gentiles from the Jews, which for example, even Peter still after the resurrection and after the giving of the Holy Spirit was still struggling with because in Acts chapter 10, I think it is, when he is sent to see Cornelius, he has this vision of all these unclean foods. He said, and God says, you know, arise, take and eat.

And he said, I'm not going to eat anything unclean. Well, wait a minute. There's nothing

really unclean at that point.

But of course, this was an analog to the unclean Gentiles and it was not lawful for them to, you know, mingle with the Gentiles. And this is a conflict that Peter had and was resolved by this vision. And he even explained it to Cornelius, you know, and then since God told me, go do it, then whatever their law was that they couldn't darken the threshold of a Gentile, that wasn't God's law.

That was getting in the way of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. And so Paul goes into detail talking about dividing that, I'm sorry, destroying that dividing wall. This is again, in Ephesians 2, having removed the mosaic law, which was the thing that kept the Jews and the Gentiles apart so that they can all be made into one new man.

And that would be the church in which there's no Jew and no Gentiles. So there's a broad explanation about why a lot of these laws were given that did not have universal more character, but were morally obligatory for the Jews, given God's command, the reason for them is then trying to pick and choose. And by the way, you still should need pork, you know, because it's not good for you.

And that just create more confusion with the Jews. It was a, it was a huge problem for them to leave behind the commandments of the Mosaic Covenant and embrace the freedom in Christ that was available under the new covenant. That was a huge problem.

And you read through the book of Acts, you see that. And it was a charge that was laid against Paul many times. He's trying to destroy the law.

And he's telling people not to do the law. And there's a certain sense that was not true. And there's a certain sense it was true.

So maybe, I mean, my, maybe this falls underneath. But this is, regarding the pork per se, that's my speculation. This is a, you mentioned Acts, this is addressed very specifically in Galatians, in Romans, you mentioned Ephesians, because as you said, it was a huge deal for them.

And I think, I think you're right that the main thing that we can know explicitly from the Bible is that it was, the law was meant to serve as a dividing wall. And when you think about it, here God is taking a pagan guy who knows nothing about God and revealing himself to one man to Abraham. And he's trying to develop an entire culture.

If you know anything about culture, culture has changed very, very slowly. Ideas, ideas will trickle in and start to change things. Of course, today things move a lot faster because we have more methods of communication and all those sorts of things.

But to change the assumed things by a culture takes so long. And the pressure, and this is something we do understand as Christians, the pressure, the peer pressure from the

people around us is very hard to resist. So what God did is he set up a whole system of laws where they would be separate from the nations around them.

Because it's a lot easier to direct them morally, and there are a lot of moral laws also. It's a lot easier to direct them morally and shape them morally if they're not constantly being pressured by all the nations around them to become something else and have a different basic worldview about who God is and what our purpose is and all those things. And again, this is something we're starting to understand better now as we're starting to get squeezed in those very same ways and we're seeing our culture giving over to these other ideas.

And as the ideas change, some of the basic things, ways we live our lives are changing also. So all of these things protected the nation of Israel. But now consider a change in the type of the whole covenant.

So the covenant was a physical covenant, Abraham and his children, you could become a Jew if you wanted to. There were converts, but basically it was connected to the children of Abraham. Physical descendants from the seed.

So now it's a different kind of covenant. We are Christians are not one nation, all huddling together because God's still developing the worldview and developing the ideas. That's not how it is now.

He doesn't have to cordon off a nation. In fact, he wants us to go out to other nations and to go out and to reach other people. And because we're not now kind of divided by these laws, we are free to reach out to other nations where they have different, you know, non moral cultural commitments.

And there's no need for us to separate from them. And I think part of that is that God's already developed the whole worldview over thousands of years. And part of that is what we find, I think, in Romans eight where Paul talks about how we were not able to, the law doesn't give the power to obey God.

It's having the Holy Spirit who gives life to our bodies and who enables us to obey that directs us now as Christians. So because of that, I think we're in a different situation now. We don't have to huddle together and never interact with other people.

And so ironic is that they for a thousand years, they did not do a very good job of that, which is why you have the Babylonian captivity, the Assyrian dispersion. These are all judgments because of their eclectic practices taking on foreign religions. And then after the return to the Lamb, they went way the other way.

And so now Gentile was a synonym for sinner. And the Jews were the wonderful Jews. And that's why Paul has to address that in the book of Romans.

So wait a minute, just being circumcised is not magic with regards to salvation. Some people are circumcised in their heart, and that's better than the people who are not circumcised in their heart, but are circumcised in their body. So you just see this kind of radical shift and they just don't get it.

And one last thing to say about people being set apart by rules that are not moral rules. You see this in other instances, even within the nation of Israel, you see the Nazarete vow, for instance, where they were, I think that was the one where they weren't allowed to cut their hair and they weren't allowed to drink wine. Neither of those things are immoral things.

So there we see an example of rules setting apart a specific population. Sometimes it was four times, sometimes it was for longer. And it's not because those things are immoral.

There were other reasons for it. So the same thing I think is true of eating pork. Okay, Greg, let's- That's a good news for bacon lovers, like me.

Let's go on. What would be a men's breakfast beat without lots and lots and lots of bacon. And of course the obligatory pancakes, which I'm not so well about, bacon.

I'll sit there and make a whole meal out of that. All right, let's go to a question from Katie from Montana. Why does Jesus say his yoke is easy and his burden is light? We're told to take up our cross and fight sin.

Taking up a cross and fighting sin are not easy things. So why does he say his yoke is easy and his burden is light? And what ways is it easy and light? Is it because he helps us with the struggle? Well, this is something that I've had some fresh thinking about in the last couple of years. And when I ran that, this idea that I'll share by you, I got the nod.

You said you've been thinking the same thing. And what he is principally referring to there. Now, I think the way that most people take it is, look at, I'm in a tough place.

And so I'm going to help have Jesus help shoulder my burden. And I'm turning to him and trusting in him. And I think there's a way in which that's true.

I mean, and not just from that verse, but other ones. And Jesus is our friend and he walks with us and he helps us. And by knowing that he is there for us and he will never leave us or forsake us, that he has overcome the world, these other passages that talk about it.

This is a comfort for us and it helps us to endure. But I think in that case, he was making a different point. When you read the Sermon on the Mount, especially the first portion of the Mount, the chapter 5 of Matthew, there's not much good news in there.

There's a lot of bad news. And after the blessings, which sound nice and they're encouraging, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the kind, blessed are the poor in spirit. And by the way, that one is misunderstood a lot.

Poor in spirit is not poor people. There is another parallel passage where he said, blessed are the poor. But this one clarifies, he's talking about poor in spirit.

In other words, people who are aware of their spiritual poverty, they need forgiveness, okay, which is something the religious leaders did not acknowledge. And so what Jesus then begins to do after he talks about blessed are those who are persecuted. Now the tone is changing a little bit.

Wait, that doesn't sound so good. You know, rejoice and be glad for your rewarded heaven. Then he gets into some theological matters about the nature of the law.

And he says, first of all, the law is not going to be taken away. All right. Every John Tittle has to be fulfilled.

Now that creates a burden. In fact, the burden is hinted at when he says your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Now, of course, what he's referring to is the visible righteousness of these people.

The Jews understood that these are the cardinals and the popes, you know, of our religious community. These are the highest of the highest. These are the most spiritual, et cetera, et cetera.

And you're saying we have to do better than those guys to get in. This is not good news. This is bad news.

Then he gives individual instances and he says, so don't murder. Oh, I haven't done that. Well, have you called your brother a fool? Well, you're going to help.

And it's interesting in that little segment, he decreases the grievance. You know, if you hate your brother without cause, if you just call him a fool, you'll be kept in the court and he decreases the grievance, but he increases the punishment. And so if you just call him fool, now you're going to help.

Wait a minute. Then he said, don't commit adultery. Oh, it didn't do that.

You ever think about it? You're going to help. And then he closes that section with you are to be perfect as my Heavenly Father is perfect. So this is not good news.

What he is showing is what the law demands. This is bad news about bad news about bad news. And Jesus gave a lot of bad news.

And he wanted people to feel the full weight of the laws demands. And then he says,

come on to me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. So what's the rest that I think that he principally has in mind? And that is the rest for the burden of the law because he has fulfilled the law and he's made forgiveness available to law breakers.

And then this is a theme that continues more aggressively as he moves on. He talks about the Pharisee. There's the Pharisee in the front of the synagogue praying and counting his virtues before God.

And his religious virtues before God. There's the tax gatherer in the back who's beating his breast, saying, God have mercy on me, a sinner. And Jesus said that man goes away justified not this Pharisee who is apparently keeping all the demands of the law.

So I think what Jesus is releasing us from, what he is referring to there. And I can tell you quite honestly in my own life, this I was raised Roman Catholic. So I understood the demands of the law, but grace, not New Testament grace was not communicated.

You have to go back every week and Saturday afternoon to get a little more peace of it to protect you until the next time you really mess up and then you're in trouble, then you're vulnerable. It was not forgiveness and it's over. And when I learned that forgiveness was the way the New Testament expresses, that I could be justified in the moment because of my appeal to Christ.

And on the basis of Christ for forgiveness, that released a tremendous burden for my shoulders. And frankly, for my whole Christian life, having a rich understanding of the grace of God has been a tremendous help to me. So my, I think Jesus is referring to being rescuing people from the demands of the law.

And when we come to him, he is our rescuer and the burden of the law falls upon him. So, I mean, there's more that could be said about that. There are more verses that we could press into service to make this particular point.

But I think that was Jesus' main point. And the Bible, it talks about how, you know, we are entering into his rest. The whole idea of having a Sabbath to demonstrate work and then rest.

And then today is the day of entering that rest. That was supposed to be a shadow of our being entering into the rest of God by being joined to Christ and having him pay for our sins and having his righteousness because we are in him. So of course, putting your sin to death is hard.

It is very hard. And I, that is just, that is just right. That's a lifelong battle.

But without Christ, it's impossible. We are slaves of sin without Christ. Now, this is where I think, again, Romans is so helpful with all of this.

I would say like five through eight really goes into this whole topic. And one thing I wanted to bring up here is, well, I, and I can't remember what we said in everything we said in the last question because I'm always thinking about Romans. So hopefully I won't repeat myself too much.

But in chapter seven, it talks about how we, as, you know, a woman who's married is bound to her husband while he's alive. When her husband dies, she's released from the law. And what Paul says is, this is what has happened to you.

You have died to the law through the body of Christ. So you've been joined to Christ. You've died to the law so that you could be joined to another to him who raised from the dead.

So now we're joined to Christ instead of the law. And what Paul says is, you know, the law was not able to give us the power to be righteous. But now that we are joined to Christ, now that we've been released from the law and we're joined to Christ, now we can bear fruit for God.

So now we're in a position where we can kill our sin. But even though his point in chapter, you know, seven is that we can, you know, the law does not do this, but, but the Holy Spirit gives us the power to put our sin to death. Even then listen to what he says.

He says, so then brethren, this is chapter eight verse 12. So then brethren, we are under obligation not to the flesh to live according to the flesh, for if you're living according to the flesh, you must die. But if by the spirit you're putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Okay. So now people listening to that might think, oh, I'm going to live because now I'm doing righteous things. But that's not the reason he gives.

Here's the reason he gives for all who are being led by the spirit of God. These are sons of God. So he's saying it's indicative of the fact that you are now sons.

It's not that you're earning it. It's that you are now sons. And then he says, for you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you've received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba, Father, the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

And if children, heirs also heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. So his whole point here is, yes, you, if you go back to six, he was talking about, oh, should we just sin if we are saved by grace? And he says, no. And the reason why is because we are no longer slaves to sin and are the purpose of our being saved so that we will bear fruit for God.

And so now we're able to do that. And we're not saved because we're able to do that. The fact that we're able to do that indicates that we have the spirit and we are sons of

God and we have that rest and we have that, that we no longer have a spirit of fear leading to slavery again.

We have a spirit of sons. We have been adopted. We have that rest.

We have that guarantee. We have that knowledge that we have been saved. And that is why his yoke is easy and his burden is like two post scripts.

So when you read the Romans eight passage for as many as being led by the spirit of God, these are sons of God, but you read the whole context. It's very clear in that passage that led by the spirit, according to Paul, does not have bear any resemblance to the way most people use the phrase. Paul is not talking about getting nudge, nudge, nudge, hint, hint, little whisper, whisper, whisper about what to do and where to go and who to marry and what job to take.

Oh, I felt led. No, being led is not a feeling. Being led is a result.

Being led according to Paul is a result of the spirit working in your life that you're not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. That's the theme of that first part of that chapter. And it is putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

Being led by the spirit is growing in holiness by the spirit's power. And that's the same way the same phrase is used. The only other place in the New Testament where it's used is in Galatians five.

And that's also Pauline and he uses it exactly the same way. So just a little tutorial on the phrase led by the spirit. The other thing I was going to say was Romans five starts out with these words.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. It's not the peace of God. There's that.

But that's not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about we have peace with God. In other words, we're not at war with God anymore.

God's not at war with us. We have been reconciled together. How we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have received our introduction into this grace in which we stand.

Okay. So another way, there's the emphasis. That's the burden that is light that we benefit from in virtue of being justified by faith.

And I need to say one last thing because Paul said it also because he knew it was important and it was crucial that people hear this. But what he points out is this doesn't mean if you are being led by the spirit, that doesn't mean that you are perfect now. He actually says we're groaning.

We are still subject to sin. We are groaning within ourselves and we're waiting eagerly for adoption of sons, the redemption of our body. And he says, for in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for what he already sees.

And then he talks about how the Holy Spirit, I think what currently what I'm thinking about, you know, the spirit interceding with groans too deep for words, I think he's still talking about the groaning that he was talking about in the previous paragraphs where creation is still struggling under their sin. So as we're struggling under our sin, the spirit helps in our weakness. He prays for us, then it goes right into the passage about God making us into the image of his son.

So all of this is about the Holy Spirit working within us, but with the understanding that we're not there yet. It is in hope. It is happening.

We are being conformed to the image of a son and his point is that it's guaranteed it will happen. But right now we're still groaning. We're still fighting our sin.

We're still putting our sin to death. So if you are not perfect, do not hear, do not hear me saying that the having the Holy Spirit makes you perfect. In fact, why don't you memorize Romans six through eight.

There you go. And that might help you to grasp. I, I, or at least read it carefully a bunch of times.

Yes, you could do that too. But memorizing does so much to help this because you see how all the parts fit together. We're so used to getting little bits here and there that it takes a while reading it all at once to realize, oh my gosh, all this time, people have been using this verse by itself.

And I never understood how it related to the previous chapters, let alone the sentences around it. So your sense is the passage in the Gospels where Jesus says, coming to me all who are weary and let heavy ladenest specifically and principally related to the burden of the law that he has removed. And now we have Christ, you know, as our advocate, which is a light burden by the parish.

And there are passages that talk about entering into his rest in other places that have to do with ceasing from our works. And I can't think of where it is at this, at this one second. But I think there are explicitly places that say that, that go along with what you have said here.

All right, Greg, we've gone a little bit over. But that's it. So you have been listening to the hashtag STR ask podcast.

This is Amy Holland, Greg Coco for Stand to Reason. .