



Was the Law Abolished?

by Ronald L. Dart

Now that we're getting so many new people on our list (800 today, that's very exciting), we're beginning to encounter questions again that I haven't heard, really, in quite a long time. People are getting back to the old bedrock questions—or maybe what we might call the *skeptical* questions—where we have come along and we've, kind of, challenged them a little bit on some cherished, long-held belief. And, naturally, they don't just roll over and play dead; they've got a number of questions of their own—things that they've heard, things that they've read, or they went and asked their minister. And the minister said, “Oh, no”, and he gives them a statement, and then they come back and ask us, “Well, would you answer what *he* told me.”

One of the most common questions (and I guess it arises out of our own emphasis in the broadcast) is: Did Christ abolish the law? Now, a lot of the scriptures that you get when people start talking about where the law has been done away are from Paul, but the fact of the matter is that, unless *Jesus* abolished the law, what Paul has to say about it at some later period of time is really kind of irrelevant. So the more *fundamental* place to go—the more *bedrock* place to go—if you want to ask questions about the abolition of law is: Did *Christ* abolish the law? These questions tend to focus on a couple of specific incidents in Jesus' ministry, and I'd like to maybe...I don't want to go into great detail or try to establish the whole doctrine today; what I would like to do is more or less locate the pegs at the corners of the property, as it were, or give you the shape of the foundation of this thing so that, as things begin to develop or you run across arguments, you can at least know where the landmarks are—you at least know, in general, what the shape of this thing should be.

The most aggressive teachers of Jesus' day were legalists, and Jesus knew right from the outset that he was going to be misunderstood. These men were legalists; they were not only legalists, they were legislators. They and their predecessors had, over a matter of generations, taken God's law. Not satisfied with that, they had to explain and interpret and explain and interpret. And their interpretations became their traditions. And their traditions became locked-in and (especially those traditions of former generations) really began to take on with these people all the force of Scripture. And so you not only had to live by Moses, but you had to live by the rabbinical schools, the Babylonian Talmud, and all of the midrashes—all of the things that had been written by previous rabbis about this that had gained acceptance among the people. Their traditions and rules and regulations regarding the Sabbath alone would have filled a volume, and the *explanations* of them would have filled a library. It's incredible—the extent to which these people are gone.

Now, Jesus fully intended, throughout his ministry, to *obey God's law*. He was going to obey God's law *perfectly*, in all of its parts. But he had *no intention* of obeying all of these rabbinical rules. In fact, it was essential that at any point where this this veil—this tapestry that they had woven over generations—*obscured* the law of God, it was necessary that he *tear it down*. Now, knowing that he was going to do this, he also knew then that he was going to be misunderstood. What do you suppose was one of the first names somebody would call him today if he set out doing what he did with them? Well, he would be called a liberal, right off the bat. They certainly were going to accuse him of, at best, being a liberal

—and, at worst, of being a rank heretic who had come, who was set out, who was determined to destroy God’s law.

Now, as I said, if he didn’t want to be misunderstood in this matter, one of his very first sermons—one of the first times that he ever sat down and began to expound his doctorate—he made himself *quite clear* on this matter. The reference is found in Matthew, the fifth chapter, in the Sermon on the Mount, and I’d like for you to turn there with me and read. Jesus said, verse 17:

Matthew 5

AKJV

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

Now, that statement could not be misunderstood by anyone who was there. The expression “the law and the prophets” was just another way of saying “the Old Testament”. “The law” was a designation for the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament. “The prophets” tended by usage to include the writings, as well. And so “the law and the prophets” is just the whole body of the Holy Scriptures. And when you think about it, it would be *absurd* for him to think in terms of tearing down or destroying the law and the prophets; for, after all, both the law and the prophets had *foretold him*. They were that which legitimized everything that he was about to do. So, when you think of it that way, what could he do? He could not abolish that which legitimized what he was about to do; he could only fulfill those things. So he said, “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill”. The Greek word *pléroó* [πληρώω, Strong’s G4137] means simply: to fill it up. “I’m come to fill it up.”

Matthew 5

AKJV

¹⁹ Whoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ For I say to you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Now, that’s simple enough, isn’t it? It’s really relatively plain. He said, “I’m not come to destroy the law or the prophets.” He says, in fact, “until heaven and earth pass” (verse 18). How long is that going to take? There’s two conditions: until heaven and earth pass; until all be accomplished. That second “fulfilled”, by the way, is not the same Greek word as the first. I don’t know why the King James translators chose to translate it that way. The second word is *ginomai* [γίνομαι, Strong’s G1096], and even if you don’t know Greek you can tell that’s different from *pléroó*. And, basically, it means “until everything is accomplished.” So he says:

Matthew 5

NIV

¹⁸ [...] until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

But didn’t Jesus modify the law? Yeah, he certainly seems to. And yet, since he has said himself, “I am not come to destroy the law. I *cannot* annul the law. I *cannot* do away with even so much of the smallest letter or stroke of the pen of the law—that anyone who disobeys the law and teaches men so shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven”, he has effectively barred himself from annulling, abolishing, or taking away the stroke of a pen from the law of God, hasn’t he? Then what is he doing

when he modifies the law? Well, I think all we have to do is turn over the page and read what he says. In verse 27:

Matthew 5

AKJV

²⁷ You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery:

²⁸ But I say to you, That whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Now, is that an annulment of the law? Well, of course not. It's not an annulment, at all. What is it? It is an *interpretation* of the law. It may well be a very *different* interpretation from the interpretations these people had been hearing from the rabbis. It is an interpretation of the law; it is an *administrative statement*, if you will. Because there is, by the way, a very large difference between law and administration. Take this is an aphorism, if you will (and you might want to jot it down and see if you can find an exception to it): There has never been a law given that did not require interpretation. How can you possibly cover all the avenues and all the questions and all the possibilities of things that people might wonder about by legislation. You see, the Pharisees tried to do. Whenever anybody had a question, they felt they had to have some kind of an answer to it. So they arrived at an answer and they wrote it down. And then that gave rise to yet another question, and so they found that answer and they wrote that one down. And they were doing their best to try to get everything down in the law, so that the law could be an end in itself—that the law actually could be a way of salvation, a way of achieving righteousness, a way of getting where you were going. And all they were doing was proving, the whole while, that there was never a law given that did not require interpretation. Jesus, then, did not come to set aside the law, but he *did* come to set aside the current administration of the law. He intended that from the day he began his ministry. From the very outset of the whole thing, as he set out to obey *God's* law, he had to make a distinction between the law—the intent of the law as he had originally given it (and he *was* the one who originally gave it)—and the interpretations that the *current* administration had placed upon those laws. He did not intend to do it immediately, because he told the people:

Matthew 23

AKJV

² [...] The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

³ All therefore whatever they bid you observe, that observe and do[...]

This is the current, you know, *authorized* administration, but Jesus Christ came to set that administration aside. Now, the first question—the first incident—that people turn to when they want to ask the question about Jesus abolishing the law is found in the 12th chapter of Matthew, and it has to do with the allegation that Jesus broke the Sabbath. Every once in a while, someone will write us a question; they'll say "Did Jesus break the Sabbath? I've been told that he broke the Sabbath." In fact, *some translations* actually word it that Jesus "broke the Sabbath" and they give us this scripture. Well, turn to Matthew, the 12th chapter, verse one, and let's see what we can find.

Matthew 12

AKJV

¹ At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat.

² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, Behold, your disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath day.

Oh, really? Whose law? Where is it written in the law that you're not allowed to pluck some handfuls of corn as you're wandering through a field, and eat them on the Sabbath? Well, it's not there. There *is* a statement in the law, however, that says you are not to do any *work* on the Sabbath day. Now, everyone knew that to get your oxen and your carts together, and to go out there with your wife and your sons, on the Sabbath day, into the fields, and begin to take your scythe and sweep through and harvest that corn and load up your wagon with it, work up a good sweat, bring all this back and store it in your barn on the Sabbath day, was a violation of the Sabbath. *Everybody* knew that, didn't they? What about a half a cart? "No, that's breaking the Sabbath." Well, what about a fourth of a cart? "Well, that's breaking the Sabbath." You see where I'm going?

How do you draw the line between the harvesting of a handful, or an *armful*, or a *cart-load* on the Sabbath? Well, you *decide*. It's as simple as that. This is what I mean when I say there's never been a law given that does not require interpretation. The Pharisees *had decided* that it was a sin to... (because they couldn't find any place to draw the line)... that if it was work loading up the cart; if it was work harvesting the grain; then harvesting *one* was less work—but it was work—than harvesting a bushel... or ten bushels. So, they concluded that what Jesus' disciples had done was not lawful to do on the Sabbath day. That was an administrative decision that they had made relative to the Sabbath that *Jesus* did not recognize. Do you understand where I'm going? *His* administration was going to be quite different, but he had absolutely no intention of *doing away with* the law. His disciples weren't breaking the Sabbath, they were violating the Pharisees' traditions of the Sabbath.

Matthew 12

AKJV

³ But he said to them, Have you not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him;

⁴ How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

Now, I won't go back to the Old Testament reference on this [**1 Samuel 21:1–9**]. I think it might be worth it for you to do so. It's rather interesting. You probably have a marginal note in your Bible. but David and his men were hungry, and they went into the house of God there, and they said, "Do you have anything to eat?" He said, "Well, no. I've only got the showbread here." Now, Jesus said: Here were a group of hungry men; here was some bread that it was *not lawful* for them to eat; but because of a *human need* the priest made a decision to allow them to have the bread. He said, "Well, now they can have this if they have just kept themselves from women these last days." And David says, "Boy, we've been on the march. Nobody's had a chance to be near any women for the last three days." "Well, then, I guess it will be all right."

Jesus recognized that the priest had the authority to interpret God's law that way—to actually make an exception based upon a need and to give people something to had to have. He said, "Now, don't you fellows know that?" He realized that there was a right and a responsibility upon himself, and the old priest realized that there was a responsibility upon himself (actually that later cost him his life, as it turned out), to make this kind of a decision that it was not God's intent that hungry faint by the wayside. The law of the showbread was given to teach the law, or a principle of, holiness. That's all. And *far overriding* that principle of holiness, in this case, was a human need for men to have something to eat when there was nothing else for them to eat. Then he goes on to say:

Matthew 12

AKJV

⁵ Or have you not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

My word. You notice he didn't say that they don't break the Sabbath. He said they *profane* the Sabbath. What are they doing? Well, they're doing the job of a butcher. They're killing animals; they're cutting animals up; they're heaving the carcasses up on the altar; they're carving up portions and giving them out to people; they're preparing to cook meals. They're going through all this rigamarole in the temple, and he said they *profane* it and are *blameless* at the same time.

Now, it's not difficult to understand how it's possible for two laws to come into conflict. And you would normally think that the greater law would set aside the lesser law, wouldn't you? You would normally think that the Sabbath law—being the one of the Ten Commandments—is greater than the ceremonial law, and that therefore the priests wouldn't offer those sacrifices on the Sabbath. But that's not what you find. What you find is that the ceremonial law, on the Sabbath, in the temple, actually took precedence over one of the Ten Commandments. Not what I would expect to find, at all. Now, Jesus went on. He said, then:

Matthew 12

AKJV

⁶ But I say to you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.

My, my. You see what he says? He said the temple, in its service, was so great that it actually could *override* the Sabbath, and there's one standing here right with you who is even greater than the temple. He's talking about himself—that Jesus had the full authority to interpret and to administer. *Not to abolish*. He claims no such authority because he's already said, "I'm not going to do that. But I am able to interpret and administer the Sabbath." It goes on to say:

Matthew 12

AKJV

⁷ But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.

What Jesus is doing at this point in time is establishing that *he* is...actually, he first of all establishes this interpretation of the law that you find here. He then identifies himself as the *ultimate interpreter* of the law. He is establishing, not a new law, but a new administration, which is a *very different concept*. And as time goes by you find him, again and again, actually exerting that authority, expressing that authority, and redefining the nature of the Sabbath, reinterpreting the Sabbath. Another illustration follows on the heels of this.

Matthew 12

AKJV

¹⁰ And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

¹¹ And he said to them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

"Is there anybody here?" he says. Now, that's very interesting. Because, obviously, in asking the question in this way he expects nobody to respond. "Of course, we would." And his point is rather pungent. It doesn't hit you, maybe, in the 20th century; we tend to think more in terms of kindness to animals. But the real issue of an animal in a pit on the Sabbath day is the *loss of the animal* and the consequent loss of income, loss of money. They would *all* go out there and get that animal out of the pit on the Sabbath day because if they didn't they were going to *lose money*. (Not to mention the fact that the poor, old animal was going to have an awfully miserable Sabbath day if you leave him in that pit over this period of time.

Matthew 12

AKJV

¹² How much then is a man better than a sheep? Why it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

There is a *profound* administrative statement about the Sabbath, and it tells you *volumes* about what a person might do. It does not tell you as much about what a person *might not* do, but it sure tells you a lot about what it *might* do: going to the hospital, helping someone whose car is broken down by the wayside, helping someone put out a fire. Some of the strangest rules had to do with when your house was burning down, in the old days, as to what you could carry out and what you couldn't carry out as far as keeping the Sabbath is concerned. Jesus makes it very plain, then, that he is the *interpreter* of the Sabbath. He did not break the Sabbath.

Now, by the very act of redefining and reinterpreting the Sabbath, what else did Jesus do? He confirmed the Sabbath. Because, you see, there is no need to interpret what is going to be done away with. If it was his intent to just do away with the Sabbath in short order, what's the point in going through all this rigamarole and exercise of explaining how to keep it and explaining what's lawful and what's not lawful, and how it's a mistake to do that and how you mustn't handle it this way, and here is what the Sabbath is for, and "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath", and "the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath", and all those explanations that Jesus offered on the Sabbath? What did he do that for if he was about to abolish it? It would make no sense at all.

The next incident is found in Mark, the seventh chapter. I'd like for you to turn back there with me because this is another question that is oftentimes asked of people. This scripture is cited as an illustration of Jesus Christ setting aside a law. The law in question, in this particular case, is the law of unclean meats. Now, ironically, you will not find unclean meats mentioned in this particular chapter. (Because that's not really what the chapter is about.) Chapter seven, verse one:

Mark 7

AKJV

¹ Then came together to him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.

² And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed, hands, they found fault.

³ For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.

Now, as time goes by, some little tradition gets established, and the longer a tradition is observed, the greater weight that it tends to carry. And I think that there are such a thing as good traditions. Paul wrote to one of the churches saying:

2 Thessalonians 2

AKJV

¹⁵ Therefore, brothers, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our letter.

1 Corinthians 11

NIV

² I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.

Tradition has a great deal of value among God's people. But it must never be confused with law. Because tradition represents an *interpretation* of the law. It represents decisions that we have made as to how to observe the law in certain circumstances and at certain time. And those traditions *can get changed*. I can recall in the Worldwide Church of God, there was a time when we believed very firmly that there should only be *one* Feast of Tabernacles location. It was for a while up in Oregon, and at last it was over here in Big Sandy. As time went by, it became *physically impossible*. It was obvious that we were not going to be able to continue having the Feast in one location. Well, there was a tradition that was fine as long as it lasted. But we came down to a point where we had to actually lay that tradition aside because circumstances dictated we had to go in another direction. So it had to be redefined. Now, here is a tradition about washing your hands. Jesus, when he listened to all this, answered them when they asked him:

Mark 7

KJ2000

⁵ [...] Why walk not your disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?

⁶ He answered and said unto them, Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

⁷ But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Notice the difference—the very distinct difference—between the commandment and the administration that was going on about the commandments. And Jesus draws the distinction sharply and says, not only have you added traditions:

Mark 7

AKJV

⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do.

⁹ And he said to them, Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition.

[...]

¹³ Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which you have delivered: and many such like things do you.

That's quite an indictment. And it is a question of administration—of decisions that have been made that have been around long enough to have acquired the patina of tradition. Now, in verse 14, after he has warned them about these things:

Mark 7

AKJV

¹⁴ And when he had called all the people to him, he said to them, Listen to me every one of you, and understand: ¹⁵There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him:

Now, that is quite a statement. It's a *profound* statement. It's *powerful*. It's very clear statement—something very hard to misunderstand. I want you, now, to just try to put on your logic cap with me and let's just think logically about this thing for a moment. What is "nothing"? It's kind of a hard concept to define, isn't it. It is a very all-exclusive word. This plant here, behind the pulpit, is *something*. Therefore it is not *nothing*, right? Now, I could conclude that if I just take off a small portion of this and I ingest *something*, I would have to conclude from what Jesus says here (Because this is not nothing.

This is something.), he says there is *nothing* which from without a man (this is without) entering into a man can defile him. Right? We're all together, so far? We're all in good shape, right?

Now, supposing on the other hand, that I went out in the forest and I found me a few mushrooms over here around a tree somewhere. Good-looking mushrooms. There are a couple of them that were a little different from the rest. I didn't pay much attention. Those two happen to be Death Angel mushrooms—quite poisonous, okay. I gather all that stuff up. I put it in a pot. I fried them all up and got some sautéed mushrooms here and I put them on the table for you and I to enjoy together. Those are *something*; those are not *nothing*, right? But then, based upon what Jesus says, there is *nothing*—not even this pan-full of mushrooms—that is outside of a man, entering into the man, that can defile him. Is that right? Yeah, that's absolutely true.

I can go a step further. I've got a nice ham sandwich—thick, juicy ham; a couple big slabs of tomato on it; and lettuce; and a little mayonnaise on the bread. That ham sandwich is *something*. It cannot, from outside of you entering into you, by Jesus definition, defile you. Now, what's he talking about? Logically, first of all, we can understand very quickly that we cannot substitute the word “harm” for the word “defile” in this equation. Because there *are* things from outside of you that, entering into you, can harm you. Are there not? Fine, we're all okay, so far.

Now, there are two Greek words that are oftentimes confused by people having to do with defiled, with unclean, and this sort of thing. The two words are *koinos* and *akathartos*. And I'll take a moment just to try to explain to you the difference between these two words so you understand. The word *koinos* [κοινός, Strong's G2839] is actually the Greek word for “common”. It had a generalized use among the classical Greeks of anything we held together—that we own together. In other words, if we hold a piece of land together, we hold it in common. A common room in a university comes in that same sort of a root. It's a place where all of the students come together. It's a room they had in common. So it is not a particularly difficult word. But this word was taken by the Jews, in their writings when they wrote in Greek, with a very specific meaning. Since the word “holy” means “set apart”, anything that is holy, then, is *not common*. It is not just common things; it is holy or set apart. The word “common”, in Jewish usage, is the opposite of “holy” and, therefore, basically means “unholy”. Follow me so far?

Okay, the word *akathartos* [ἀκάθαρτος, Strong's G169] is a different word. It is the opposite of clean or pure. Something that is, on this on this side of the equation, clean and pure—we put the word *a* in front of it, making it the opposite. It is unclean. The difference in usage of the two words is that *koinos* has to do with unholy, and it is a more of a ceremonial or spiritual concept. You can be unholy, in a spiritual sense. You can be unholy, in a ceremonial sense. But it means unholy. *akathartos*, on the other hand, means essentially something that is not clean. For example, there were laws in the Old Testament having to do with a man when he had an issue of the flesh. He was unclean. He was not necessarily unholy as a result of that. He was unclean. It's not the same. The woman who had had a child was unclean for a certain number of days after the birth of the child. She was not unholy; she was unclean. It's the opposite of clean. So that *akathartos* has to do with physical or moral uncleanness, and it can be used in either way. Actually, the original meaning, I think, is physical, but then it is carried forward to refer to moral uncleanness, as well, in the Bible.

Now, take a look at what Jesus says from this perspective. The word he chooses here is not “unclean”; it is “unholy”. “There is nothing from without a man that, entering into him, can make him unholy.” If you eat a plate-full of Death Angel mushrooms, you are going to be *very dead*—but you will not be defiled. You will not be unholy. Now, if we read along here we begin to understand this perhaps a little more clearly. There is nothing—*nothing*; not *some* things, or *a few* things—there is *nothing* from outside of a man that comes into him, that is ever going to make him *unholy*.

have ears to hear, let him hear.

¹⁷ And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.

They didn't follow him completely down the line. He said:

Mark 7

AKJV

¹⁸ [...] Are you so without understanding also? Do you not perceive, that whatever thing from without enters into the man, it cannot defile him;

¹⁹ Because it enters not into his heart, [...]

Oh! Unholiness, then, and defilement is a matter of the heart, not of the flesh. And that's where we get the situation where you could eat something poisonous and do a great deal of harm to yourself, but that you do not change your heart before God.

Mark 7

AKJV

¹⁹ Because it enters not into his heart, but into the belly, and goes out into the draught, purging all meats?

And that last expression just simply means: just purging them out of the body. There's no other significance. Some translators have actually reached out and grabbed three additional words and put them into the text here. And they say:

Mark 7

NIV

¹⁹ [...] (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

And, I'm sorry, that's not in any ancient Greek text at all. Basically, he's just saying, "Look. You eat it. It goes in your body. It goes out into the latrine, and all these foods are purged right out of the body." (By the way, the word is "food", not meat. The King James used the word "meat" for food and the word "flesh" for what you and I call meat. This is just an illustration of the way language changes over time.) So it's really not that difficult, as I said. Jesus then goes on to explain:

Mark 7

AKJV

²⁰ And he said, That which comes out of the man, that defiles the man.

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

²² Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

²³ All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Now, I don't have too much trouble basically understanding what he's driving at here. Now, he does accomplish one interesting interpretation here—a question that has bothered a lot of people over time. He basically does clarify the reason why the Old Testament laws of clean and unclean meats were given. They were given for health reasons, for physical reasons, for your body. They were not given to

make you holy, separate, apart, peculiar. It's not possible. The reason? Look again at what he said. This same chapter, verse 15:

Mark 7

AKJV

¹⁵ There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him[.]

When was this statement made? Relatively early in his ministry. A long time before he was crucified. Before anything that was nailed to the cross was nailed there. It was made under the Old Covenant, in the present tense. Do you realize that what he is doing is making a statement of the way things are, and they have always been, and always will be? The day Leviticus 11 was written down on paper for the first time, there was nothing that, from outside the body coming into the body, could defile a man spiritually. Nothing could make a man unholy. This is a statement about the way things are—not a new interpretation, really—a restoration of just a commonsense principle. Just explains it and goes right on down through it—all in the present tense. So one thing Jesus does do: he answers a question that has bothered a lot of people. In fact, it was a point of issue between Herbert W. Armstrong and the Church of God (Seventh-Day) many years back. That they felt that it *was* a spiritual sin. Herbert W. Armstrong said it was a *physical* sin. Now, I think the physical-spiritual sin dichotomy is totally artificial, but it is important, I think, to say that what Jesus is saying is that the law of clean unclean meats (whatever else we may believe about it) was given for physical reasons and for health reasons—not because of holiness or something of that nature.

Now, the matter under discussion here, though, going back to this chapter, is not unclean meats. It's of eating any food with unwashed hands. There is not a hint in the Bible that anyone present understood otherwise. I think that's very important. Here's Jesus talking to a bunch of folks out here. If he had intended to say on this occasion that he was changing the dietary laws—he was now making all those foods...*all foods are clean*. There is no such thing anymore as an unclean food. What would you expect to find, in the pages of the Bible, after Jesus Christ of Nazareth has made that public statement? (Or even that private statement?) Well, first of all, if he had made the statement in public, what would you have expected from the Pharisees? What sort of reaction would you have expected? Well, I would have to say if Jesus had stood in front of a bunch of Pharisees and said, "Fellows, it's all right to eat pigs", I think there would have been a *very violent reaction*. And nothing was said at all. The Pharisees did not seem to understand it that way.

We're reading here from Mark's account. He was obviously there and he tells us what he tells us. We have that account. Matthew was present. Matthew's account is recorded in Matthew 15, verses 1 through 20. What does Matthew say? Well, Matthew gets all the way down the end of it and Jesus says:

Matthew 15

AKJV

²⁰ These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defiles not a man.

It's not what from without comes *into* the body, but it's what comes *out of you*. It's not a matter of eating without washing hands. Matthew didn't understand anything about it, really, except the fact that Jesus was saying that you didn't have to scrub your hands before you ate—that having dirty hands wasn't going to somehow make you unholy before God. Peter was present on this day. How did *he* understand what Jesus said? Now, let's turn back to Acts, the tenth chapter. I think it's really very important to understand this, because, as I say, Peter was right there. He heard every word that was said in public, and when he went back in the room—all of them, they were there together and they said, "Lord, what do you mean by this?"—he heard the rest of the explanation. And he wandered up and down the hills and all way back and forth up and down Palestine with Jesus for three-and-a-half years. He had time to ask any questions he wanted to hear—hear *all* the teaching and *all* the explanations. And Peter... what did Peter understand about this statement? Acts, the tenth chapter, and verse nine:

Acts 10

AKJV

⁹ On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:

¹⁰ And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

¹¹ And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending on him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

¹² Wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

I mean, there were snakes and cockroaches and every sort of animal you could possibly imagine: dogs, cats, horses, the whole works were there.

Acts 10

AKJV

¹³ And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

How did Peter understand Jesus' statement? Well, now, if he had understood Jesus on that day to say that he was changing the law of clean and unclean meats, I would think that Peter would have just got up, killed him something, and ate it. And if you stop to think about it...if Peter had just jumped up in the vision and gone over and killed something and ate it, where does this vision go, then? Where does the whole episode go? Nowhere. All of a sudden, all we've done is confirm the old change on unclean meats and go merrily off into the sunset. But Peter, *in the face of a voice from heaven*, refused. Now, I'll have to own up to the fact that if I heard a voice from heaven, and I believed that voice was God, and it told me to do something, I would really feel like doing it. But, you know, Peter was a whole lot closer to the origin of this than I was. Peter had seen Jesus alive after he was dead. He had handled him, touched him, sat down and ate with him. He'd been rebuked by the Lord himself. He'd been through all this rigamarole. He was there. He was a lot closer to it than I was. And Peter heard a voice from heaven, and he *called* it "Lord", and he *still* didn't do what it said. That's profound and far more important, I think, than we realize.

One: Peter knew better than to break God's law because a voice from heaven told him to do it. But would God tell you to do something that he didn't expect you to do? Yeah, I think so. He told Abraham to go kill Isaac [**Genesis 22**], offer him as a sacrifice, and had no intention of allowing him to carry it out. Who's to say that if Peter jumped up, walked across, and started killing, he would have stopped him before he did it. There's nothing there. Then there is the situation where Jesus, talking about the problems a person can get into committing adultery said, "If your right hand offend you, cut it off." [**Matthew 5:30, Mark 9:43.**]

Did he really mean that? Of course not. You and I know that it's not your right hand that causes the problem when you steal something. It's what's going on up in here. You've got to cut off your head if you expect to get anywhere with "cutting it off".

The fact of the matter is that the command that comes from God is a metaphorical command. It is not literal. It's not one that he expects to be obeyed. It is given for effect. It is given to illustrate a point. And Peter...it never crossed his mind, even though he was present on the day when Jesus Christ made all those statements, and had been with him three-and-a-half years, and whatever there was that Jesus had taught about unclean mates, Peter knew it. Now he gets a command from God and he refuses. And he gets *another* command and he refuses. And he gets a *third* one and he refuses. Would you conclude

from that that Peter did not understand, at this point in his life, that it was all right to eat unclean meats? I just got to come to that conclusion.

And, in fact, the stronger the case I make that this voice speaking to him is God, the more significant becomes his refusal at this late time. I just can't get away from it, try as I might. I can look for all the angles I can to try to approach it differently. I can look at Peter being just stubborn. He's not *that* stubborn—not three times with a voice from heaven telling him to do something. Interestingly enough, Peter used both of the words in question. He said:

Acts 10

AKJV

¹⁴ [...] Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

“Nothing unholy and nothing unclean, ever, in my life.” And he, basically, continued to refuse. And after it was all over:

Acts 10

AKJV

¹⁷ [...] Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean [...]

Now, frankly, most people—Protestant ministers I've heard extemporize on this subject—wouldn't have a single doubt in their mind what that meant. Here we are, 2,000 years later, and we just *know* what all this means. Oh? There's Peter, right there at the time, having been with the Lord, and he didn't know what it meant. And when finally it gets around to Peter interpreting it for everybody, he said:

Acts 10

AKJV

²⁸ [...] but God has showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

And that's basically what it amounted to. I'm not to call any man unholy. I can't do that. I cannot declare the Gentiles cannot be a part of God's kingdom—who is going to refuse water that these people might be baptized through all this. So another factor you'd have to also remember is that Peter was actually present, also, on the day when Jesus stood up and said:

Matthew 5

ASV

¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

And so, like I said, he knew better than to break God's law just because a voice from heaven told him to do it. He realized that this was a metaphorical command. Otherwise, you can't say “no” to God. You can decline and say “no” to God on a metaphorical command, but you cannot on the literal one. John was also present on this day. And I noticed something in John's writings that I had never seen before. (You want to turn back to Revelation, the 18th chapter?) I had never in my life noticed this, for some reason. I read it, but it just crossed right over my mind and never registered. Here's John, in vision, seeing an angel late in his life. The actual vision is received probably after AD 90, but, of course, the vision is clean forward in the Day of the Lord. Listen to what happens here—what he records.

Revelation 18

JUB

¹ And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power, and

the earth was illuminated with his glory. ² And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of demons, and the hold of every unclean spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Ha! There was such a thing as an unclean bird. How's that possible if that law was changed and there was nothing unclean anymore? (And the word is *akathartos*, by the way. And this is the unclean bird of Leviticus 11 that he's talking about.) There's an interesting thing here, too, that I've thought about a little bit. There is this curious affinity in the Bible between unclean animals and unclean spirits. I've rather been fascinated by that. In fact, there was this occasion where Jesus encountered a demoniac who was infested with demons. And he says:

Mark 5

AKJV

⁹ And he asked him, What is your name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

¹⁰ And he sought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

¹¹ Now there was there near to the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

¹² And all the devils sought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

And do you suppose that if Jesus had said, “No, no, no. It's not that which comes into a man that will defile him. Pigs are all right, now, to eat.” That he would have destroyed all these pigs (and, apparently, it was a huge herd of swine) which represented valuable property to someone? Allowed that to happen? You can't prove much by that, but it sure seems like an unlikely event in the event that Jesus had wanted to, you know, abolish the law of unclean meats. He wouldn't have done that. Now, Paul was *not* present on the day when Jesus made this statement, but he later on spent a great deal of time with Jesus. And I'd like to, in order to kind of be comprehensive on this aspect of today, take you to a couple statements which he makes. Romans, the 14th chapter is one of the more interesting ones, and verse 14. Paul says:

Romans 14

AKJV

¹⁴ I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteems any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Now, if you've got a Bible with good marginal notes (and I have *no idea* why the King James translators translated this the way they did) the word is *common*, not unclean. Now, when you are change what Paul says, it makes a lot more sense. He says:

Romans 14

AKJV

¹⁴ I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing [unholy] of itself: but to him that esteems any thing to be [unholy], to him it is [unholy].

I think that says quite a bit more. That locks right in with what Jesus said. He said there's nothing from without that you eat that is going to make you unholy because it doesn't go into your heart. And Paul says, “I don't think there's anything unholy of itself.” Pig is not an *unholy* animal. They serve a use in the scheme of things—garbage collectors out in the wild. There are a lot of nasty animals in the world, we probably think have no use at all, that God says, “Oh, no. It serves a purpose. It's not unholy.” (I think mosquitoes might be a little unholy, at times. It depends on how much of my blood they're sucking. But that's not really what Paul's talking about. He's just saying that people have this idea.)

Now, this statement is made in a context. And it's made in the context of people *judging one another*. Actually, the discussion is a discussion about vegetarianism versus being willing to eat meat or flesh. This is what it's all about and Paul says, "Look, we go through this whole rigamarole of people judging, and I'm persuaded there's nothing common or unholy of itself." That's the word he used. Now, that doesn't tell us an awful lot about what Paul understood. But there's another situation here—and I'll take you to it in 2 Corinthians 6—where he uses the other word in question: the word "unclean". 2 Corinthians 6, and verse 17:

2 Corinthians 6

KJ2000

¹⁷ Therefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

¹⁸ And will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

Now, you see where Paul *does* use the word for unclean, what does he say? "Don't touch it." Now warrant that he is quoting out of the prophet Isaiah. But would he quote that that way to the Corinthians? He doesn't *say* it's Isaiah; he just says, "I'll be their God. They'll be my people. Wherefore come out from among them." The Corinthians, if they didn't know the Old Testament, wouldn't have even *known* it came from Isaiah. And he says, "Don't *touch* the unclean thing." Now, the only other incident, really, where the apostle Paul says anything about it all is in Timothy. And, as I say, in order be comprehensive I'd like to take you to that one. 1 Timothy 4. Here he is dealing with the end time.

1 Timothy 4

ASV

¹ But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons,

² through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron;

Now, what are these doctrines of demons? What sort of doctrines are there?

1 Timothy 4

KJ2000

³ Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth.

Now, that's really kind of interesting, because some people turn to that and they say, "Aha! See there?" Because it goes on to say:

1 Timothy 4

KJ2000

⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused[...]

Now that means that it is all right to eat pig (or whatever, cat or dog, I guess, if you happen to live in the Philippines or someplace like that). Whatever it is that you are going to eat, eat it. Is that what he's saying? Now, if you think about this for a moment: If it is, than that is tantamount to declaring Leviticus 11 the doctrine of demons. If it is a doctrine of demons to command people to abstain from eating pork, then Leviticus 11 would be a doctrine of demons. Look at what he does say, though:

1 Timothy 4

KJ2000

³ Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods, which [...]

Now, that is not necessarily an all-inclusive statement. It is not an unqualified statement.

1 Timothy 4

KJ2000

³ [...] foods, which God has created to be received [...]

Now, are there are things which God has not created to be received of men as food? Well, *of course*. Of course, there are things. We can figure out *for ourselves* that a lot of things are not fit to eat. There are a number of things that might not be fit to eat that we might *not* know about. And the implication is that, in giving us the laws of unclean meats in Leviticus 11, God told us some of those things that we might not know about that might make us sick—if not immediately, sometimes over years, and maybe sometimes over generations. For it is hard to tell what the long-term effects of some things might be. That there are some things which God has created—like cockroaches—which are not fit for human consumption. That’s not difficult to understand.

1 Timothy 4

KJ2000

³ [...] commanding to abstain from foods, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth.

⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if [...]

Uh-oh.

1 Timothy 4

KJ2000

⁴ [...] if it be received with thanksgiving:

⁵ For [...]

There’s an “if” and a “for” in all this. There is a caution and a cause. He says:

1 Timothy 4

KJ2000

⁴ [...] if it be received with thanksgiving:

⁵ For it is sanctified [*or set apart*] by the word of God and prayer.

Now, I’ll ask you a very simple question: Where, in the word of God, is any food set apart for human consumption? Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14—just as simple as that. Is Paul, then, saying that it’s really all right to eat anything? No. It’s one of those things which Paul has written that are sometimes a little bit difficult to understand, which those people who don’t really quite like the law very much tend to, sometimes, turn to their own destruction [**2 Peter 3:16**]. And I think that has been done in this particular case.

Now, when you really get down to it, Jesus did not come to abolish the law. What did he come for? Well, he came to *redeem* the people who had broken the law. We all know that. He also came to do three other things about the law. One: He came to correct *misconceptions* about the law, didn’t he? Well, he certainly, obviously did. He corrected a *bunch* of misconceptions and wrong ideas that people

had about the law. Two: He came to teach a *higher concept* of law—to make us realize that the law reached into our lives in a depth, and in a way, that we might not have thought was there. We might have thought that it was all right to look at a woman and lust after her and her heart, as long as we just didn't do anything about it. Jesus says, “Oh, no”:

Matthew 5

AKJV

²⁸ whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Well, we didn't understand it that way. He also goes on to say:

Matthew 5

AKJV

²¹ You have heard that it was said of them of old time, You shall not kill; and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: ²² But I say to you, That whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment[....]

That you can actually have hatred and bitterness lodged in your heart and be guilty of breaking the commandment against murder. He gave us a *higher* concept of the law. And the third thing he did was to introduce his own administration of the law, which was *very different* from that of the scribes and the Pharisees. He gave us a lot of interpretations in his ministry, didn't he? And we find a lot more interpretations of the law as received from those people that studied with him and learned from him—like Peter and Paul and James and the others. Jesus today, though, administers the law in three ways. He does it through the pages of the Bible—in his own words, his interpretations as given here in the Bible. He also does it *personally* as he lives his life in every one of us. Paul said:

Galatians 2

AKJV

²⁰ I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

If Jesus Christ is *in* us, he will administer that law *in you*. That's what happens when you make your own decisions from day to day about what you're going to do about whether this is really stealing if you take this thing home from work or not. Whether this is *really* a violation of the Sabbath for you to do this or sell that or buy the other thing or pay this bill or do whatever it is you do. You make those decisions day by day—hopefully listening to Christ in you as he says, “Yes that's not a bad idea” or “No, I don't think you ought to do that.” For Christ in you—his Holy Spirit—it does administer his lawyer regularly. And third: he administers the law collectively through the ministry. For there are many decisions that oftentimes involve more than one person, and a number of people. And so when that happens and there are sometimes conflicts as to what people see, somebody, somewhere, sometime, somehow, has got to make a decision. And that's what Jesus meant when he said:

Matthew 16

AKJV

¹⁹ And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

He wasn't talking about interfering in private lives. He was talking about decisions that often involve more than one person—where they cannot be easily resolved by those people. The ministry has a

responsibility for making many of those decisions. That's how Christ administers the law in the 20th century. In conclusion, would you turn back with me one more time to Matthew, the fifth chapter. Once again Jesus says:

Matthew 5

KJ2000

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

¹⁹ Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰ For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

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Was the Law Abolished?

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