

The Biblical Prohibition from Eating Blood¹

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Does the prohibition from eating blood (Gen 9:4-5; Lev 7:26-27; 17:10-12, 14; 19:26; Dtn 12:16, 23-24; 15:23; Acts 15:19-20; concerning sacrifices only²; Lev 3:17) and the prohibition from eating the meat of animals that have not been slaughtered or still contain their blood (Ex 22:30; Lev 17:15; Dtn 14:21; Acts 15:19-20) concern a ceremonial order of Jewish times which need only be a guide for our spiritual wisdom today, or are those prohibitions moral commandments still valid today without any changes?

There are three reasons why I believe the latter.

First, the command was given first to Noah (Gen 9,4-5)³ before Israel existed.

Second, the apostolic council prohibited the eating of blood and of unslaughtered animals (Acts 15:19-20): "... that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood".

Third, and of course of less power than those two biblical arguments, the early Church viewed Acts 15:20 as a valid prohibition. The second and third argument have to be

1 Reprinted from "The Biblical Prohibition to Eat Blood". *Chalcedon Report* No. 355 (Febr 1995): 34-35

2 In Lev 3:14-17; 7:23-25 it is not only forbidden to eat blood, but also to eat fat. But only those parts of all the fat of an animal were meant, that were used in case of a sacrifice. The law was only valid, as long as Israel was on the move and had to slaughter all animals at the tabernacle. As soon as it settled down, it could slaughter the animals in every city and could eat the fat (Dtn 12:15-16).

3 That Gen 9:4 contains this prohibition is defended by Carl F. Keil. *Genesis und Exodus*. Brunnen Verlag: Giessen, 19834 (reprint of 18783). p. 124 (see English edition of 'Keil/Delitzsch')

proven in detail.

(Second) The decision of the apostolic council is much disputed. Some think the decision merely repeats the commandments given to Noah (Gen 9). But some of them are actually missing in Acts 15. Others believe that the decision contains a list of all moral commandments still valid for heathens. Does this mean that non-Jewish Christians may kill, steal and lie? Some believe that the commandments only concern non-Jewish Christians as long as they live together with Jews or Jewish Christians. But should we avoid idolatry and fornication only because this offends people from Jewish background?

The best explanation why the apostolic decision only forbids four specific sins seems to be that the decision was answering a catalogue of specific questions. Out of the catalogue the apostolic council choose those commandments which bind the non-Jewish Christians, and left out others. Thus the text can be reconciled with the other meeting of the Apostles with Paul and his co-workers in Galatians 2. Here another catalogue of issues were in question and the Apostles ruled that circumcision was not necessary for non-Jewish Christians, but helping the poor was.

I see no reason in any available explanation of Acts 15,19-20 why this decision should be invalid today. Even a Dispensationalist who only accepts commandments if they are found or repeated in the New Testament, must take this decision seriously.

(Third) In 1903 and 1907, Karl Böckenhoff studied in detail the history of the two food laws in Acts 15,19-20 in the first five centuries A. D.⁴ and in the Middle Ages⁵ and proved that the early Church understood the food laws in Acts 15,20 to be valid commandments. The prohibition from eating blood and unslaughtered animals was repeated in the Councils of Gangrene (325 A. D.), Orleans (536), Constance (692) and by Pope Leo VI. (886) and Calixtus II (1120)⁶. In the Eastern and Orthodox Churches the prohibition has been seen as valid from the church fathers till today⁷. In the Western Church the prohibition was in force till the beginning of the 12th century⁸. Not until the

4 Karl Böckenhoff. *Das apostolische Speisegesetz in den ersten fünf Jahrhunderten*. Ferdinand Schöningh: Paderborn, 1903

5 Karl Böckenhoff. *Speisesatzungen mosaischer Art in mittelalterlichen Kirchenrechtsquellen des Morgen- und Abendlandes*. Aschendorffsche Buchhandlung: Münster, 1907

6 P. J. Verdam. *Mosaic Law in Practice and Study Throughout the Ages*. J. H. Kok: Kampen, 1959. p. 19 agrees with this.

7 See in detail Karl Böckenhoff. *Speisesatzungen*. 1907. pp. 37-40

8 Ibid. pp. 62-65+66-70

time of scholasticism was the prohibition first discussed and than neglected⁹ most openly by Robert Pulleyn in 1140 A. D.¹⁰. In many places, like Geneva, the prohibition was in force at least till the Reformation¹¹. There is no proof that the prohibition from eating blood was a later “Roman-Catholic” addition to the early Church, but much proof that a biblical prohibition accepted by the whole Church from the beginning for at least one thousand years has been put aside without even an attempt at justification.

9 Ibid. pp. 118-120

10 Ibid. pp. 120-122

11 See P. J. Verdam. *Mosaic Law in Practice and Study Throughout the Ages*. Ibid. p. 19