

6 *Paul Contradicts Jesus About Idol Meat*

Introduction

Jesus in Revelation 2:6, 14 takes on those persons teaching the Ephesians that it was acceptable to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Among them Jesus says were the Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans were an actual historical group. They taught Paul's doctrine of grace permitted them to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Jesus commends the Ephesians for refusing to listen to the Nicolaitans on the issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Yet the Nicolaitans were not merely deducing it was permissible to eat such meat from Paul's doctrine of grace. Paul, in fact, clearly teaches *three times* that there is nothing wrong *per se* in eating meat sacrificed to idols. (Romans 14:21; 1 Corinthians 8:4-13, and 1 Corinthians 10:19-29.)

However, Jesus, as we will see, three times in Revelation says it is flatly wrong. The Bible says when God commands something, we are not free to "diminish" it by articulating our own exceptions. "What thing soever I command you, that shall ye observe to do: thou shalt not add thereto, *nor diminish from it.*" (Deut. 12:32, ASV.)

Let's explore thoroughly the origin of this command against eating meat sacrificed to idols. Let's see also the starkness of the contradiction between Paul and Jesus.

Jerusalem Council Ruling on Meat Sacrificed to Idols

Acts chapter 15 recounts James' ruling at the Jerusalem Council. The issue presented was whether circumcision was necessary for salvation. The outcome was a decision involving what behaviors Gentiles had to follow as Christians. The first decision was to prohibit Gentiles who wanted to become Christians from committing fornication. The second decision was to prohibit eating meat sacrificed to idols. This principle is drawn from Exodus 34:13-16.¹

Paulinists claim that this prohibition on eating meat sacrificed to idols (which was sold in meat markets) was not an absolute command. It was flexible enough to fit Paul's approach. Paul taught idol meat was perfectly acceptable unless someone else thought it was wrong. Paulinists argue that the Jerusalem Council only meant to prohibit eating such meat if it would undermine a weaker brother who thought it was wrong, as Paul teaches.

1. Exodus 34:13 says Jews were to tear down the altars of the Gentiles rather than make a covenant (*i.e.*, a peace treaty). In Exo 34:15-16, God says if you prefer making a covenant and allow their pagan altars, you risk "one call thee [to eat with him] and thou eat of his sacrifice." The command to destroy the pagan altars was so that Jews would avoid eating meat sacrificed to idols even *inadvertently at a meal at a Gentile home*. This altar-destruction command also had the indirect affect of preventing a Gentile from eating idol meat. For this apparent reason, James in Acts 15:20, 25 and 21:25 prohibits Gentiles from eating idol meat. (On how James construed when the Law applies to Gentiles, see page 102.) It is ludicrous to argue, as some do, that God was concerned only that one *knowingly* ate such meat. If true, the Bible could have just prohibited such food as it did with other foods. However, idol meat cannot be identified by appearance. Thus, merely prohibiting eating such meat would not be enough if God was displeased by you eating it *unknowingly*. Hence, to prevent *unknowing* eating of such meat, God commands the destruction of pagan altars. Thus, Paul's allowance of eating such meat by not asking questions is precisely what the Bible *does not countenance*. Rather, if a Jew lived in a society where pagan altars operated and idol meat was sold in the market, the Law intended the Jew not to eat meat whose origin he/she could not be sure about.

However, there is no basis to believe the prohibition in Acts chapter 15 is merely a prohibition on undermining someone else, causing him to violate his conscience. It is clear that eating meat sacrificed to idols is simply wrong *in itself*. It is also no less absolute a prohibition than the prohibition on fornication. Had the Jerusalem Council ruling intended the eating-idol-meat rule to be only a command to follow during social intercourse, then the council used the wrong words to convey such an interpretation.

In fact, the prohibition on eating meat sacrificed to idols was stated three times in Acts. It was never once stated with an exception or qualification. There is no hint that eating such meat was permissible in your private meals. In fact, when we later look at Jesus' words in Revelation absolutely condemning such practice, Jesus is talking *after Paul's words are written down*. Had Jesus intended to affirm Paul's view that eating such meat is permissible, Jesus' absolute directives against *ever* eating such meat were the wrong way to communicate this. Jesus left no room to find hairsplitting exceptions.

This absolute prescription first appears at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:20. Initially, James decided that "we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions of idols...." (Acts 15:20.) Second, Luke then quotes James' letter to the Gentiles as saying one of the "necessary things" is "you abstain from things sacrificed to idols." (Acts 15:29.) James reiterates this for a third and final time in Acts chapter 21. James is reminding Paul what the ruling was at the Jerusalem Council. He tells Paul that previously "we wrote giving judgment that they [*i.e.*, the Gentiles] should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols...." (Acts 21:25.)

James restates the principle *unequivocally*. It is a flat prohibition like any food law or the prohibition on fornication. As James states the rule, it has nothing to do with rules only at social gatherings. It has no limited application. There is no exception to permit eating idol meat at home.

Jesus' Confirmation of Jerusalem Council Ruling

Jesus in Revelation 2:14 faults the churches at Pergamum for tolerating those who teach it is acceptable to eat meat sacrificed to idols and commit fornication. Jesus says “some... hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock (*skandalon*) before the children of Israel, **to eat things sacrificed to idols**, and to commit fornication.” Jesus does not say the error was eating meat sacrificed to idols only if you believed an idol was real. Nor did Jesus say it was wrong only if the person involved thought eating such meat was wrong. Jesus simply laid down a prohibition. Nothing more. Nothing less. Deuteronomy 4:2 prohibits “diminishing” from God’s *true inspired words* by making up exceptions.

In this Revelation 2:14 passage, the use of the word *skandalon* is important. In Matthew 13:41-43, Jesus warned that on judgement day all those *ensnared* (*skandalizo*-ed) will be gathered by the angels and sent to the “fiery furnace.” Hence, Jesus was telling us in Revelation 2:14 that eating meat sacrificed to idols was a serious sin. He called it a *skandalon*—a trap. It was a salvation-ending trap.

Jesus reiterates the prohibition on eating meat sacrificed to idols in Revelation 2:20. Jesus faults the church at Thyatira for listening to a false *Jezebel* who “teaches my servants to commit fornication, and **to eat things sacrificed to idols.**”

The church at Ephesus, by contrast, is commended by Jesus on this issue. The Ephesians were the ones who tried those who claimed to be an “apostle and are not, but [are] a liar” (Rev. 2:2.)² The Ephesians were also commended for rejecting the Nicolaitans’ teaching on idol meat. (Rev. 2:6.)

The Nicolaitans, Jesus notes, taught that a Christian could “eat things sacrificed to idols....” (Rev. 2:14-15.) Jesus thus has commended the church at Ephesus for not only having identified the person who falsely claimed to be an apostle, but also for its having rejected the teaching that it was permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols. It is no coincidence. The Ephesians’ rejection of someone who said he was an apostle but could not be in Rev. 2:2, if this were Paul (see Chapter Ten), would have to go hand-in-hand with the Ephesian’s rejection of Paul’s doctrine that idol meats were permissible.

Furthermore, the Nicolaitans’ true historical background reveal whose underlying teaching that Jesus is truly criticizing. Robertson (a Paulinist) in *Word Pictures* confesses the Nicolaitans defended eating such meat based on Paul’s gospel:

These early Gnostics practiced licentiousness since they were not under law, but under grace. (Robertson’s *Word Pictures* on Rev. 2:14.)³

“You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating meat sacrificed to idols.”

**Jesus in
Revelation 2:14**

2. Later, we will examine whether Jesus was identifying Paul in Rev.2:2 as a false apostle. See “Did Jesus Applaud the Ephesians for Exposing Paul as a False Apostle?” on page 215 *et seq.*

3. Irenaeus around 180 A.D. wrote that Nicolas, their founder “departed from sound doctrine, and was in the habit of inculcating *indifference* of both life and *food*.” (*Refutation of All Heresies*, 7.24.)

Therefore, we see Jesus extols those who hate the Nicolaitan's grace teaching which says Christians can eat meat sacrificed to idols. Jesus then condemns twice those who teach a Christian may eat meat sacrificed to idols. Jesus is just as **absolute** and **unwavering** on this prohibition as James is in Acts. When Jesus says it, we are not free to "diminish" it by making up exceptions. (Deut. 12:32.)

**"To the pure,
all things are
pure."**

**Paul in
Titus 1:15**

Notice too how three times James in Acts repeats the point. Then three times Jesus repeats the point in the Book of Revelation. (Rev. 2:6, 14 (Ephesus); Rev. 2:14-15 (Pergamum); Revelation 2:20 (Thyatira).) In the New Testament, there is no command emphasized more frequently than the command against eating meat sacrificed to idols.

This *three-times* principle, incidentally, is not without its own significance. For Paul says *three times* that it is permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols, as discussed next. God wanted us to *know for a fact* He is responding to Paul.

Paul Permits Eating Meat Sacrificed To Idols

Paul clearly teaches *three times* that there is nothing wrong in itself eating meat sacrificed to idols. (Romans 14:21; 1 Corinthians 8:4-13, and 1 Corinthians 10:19-29.) The first time Paul addresses the question of "eating meat sacrificed to idols," Paul answers: "But food will not commend us to God; neither if we eat not...." (1 Cor. 8:8.) Paul then explained it is only necessary to abstain from eating such meat if you are around a "weaker" brother who thinks an idol is something. (1 Cor. 8:7, 8:10, 9:22.) Then, and only then, must you abstain. The reason is that then a

**"The first sin
committed by
man was not
murder or
adultery or
stealing; it was
eating some-
thing they were
told not to eat."
Gordon
Tessler, Ph.D.
*The Genesis
Diet* (1996)
at 14.**

brother might be emboldened to do something he thinks is sinful. The brother is *weak* for believing eating meat sacrificed to an idol is wrong. This is thus a sin for him to eat, even though you know *it is not sinful* to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Thus, even though you know better than your weaker brother that it is *no sin to do so*, it is better to abstain *in his presence* than cause him to sin against his weak conscience and be “destroyed.” (1 Cor. 8:11.)⁴

Paul is essentially laying down a principle on how to be considerate of others who *think it is wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols*. At the same time, Paul insists as a matter of principle, *there is nothing wrong eating such meat*. If you were instead the *weaker brother*, and read Paul’s epistles on this topic, you certainly would walk away knowing Paul teaches it is *permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols*. You would even think your *weak-mindedness* on this issue should be abandoned. You should no longer burden your conscience on your brother who refrains due to your overly sensitive conscience. With Paul’s instructions in hand, you would certainly *know* that it is permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols. You can now get over your undue and ill-founded concern about eating such meat.

4. Paul is thought to teach you should not take communion if one was eating idol meat at a pagan service. In 1 Cor. 10:20-21, Paul says you cannot be partaker of the Lord’s table and the “table of devils.” This was thus not a flat prohibition on eating idol meat. Most commentators reconcile Paul to Paul by saying Paul means you cannot go to a pagan sacrifice and eat the meat during a pagan service and still partake of communion. There is still thus nothing inherently wrong in eating such meat. In the context in which Paul says this, Paul also repeats his famous axiom, “all things are lawful, but not all things are expedient.” (1 Cor. 10:23.) Then Paul says when you buy food or eat a stranger’s home, “ask no question for sake of your conscience.” (1 Cor. 10:25,27.) Thus, Paul says it is best you *not know* what you are eating. Don’t let your *conscience* dictate questions about what you are eating. In a sense, Paul believes it is better you not know the meat’s origin rather than try to scrupulously avoid eating such meat.

In teaching this, Paul is clearly contradicting James and Jesus. He thereby is “diminishing” Jesus’ words by contradicting Him. Paul is prohibiting eating such meat only if someone else is foolish enough to think eating such meat is wrong. Paul has turned Jesus’ words on their head. Paul developed a relativistic approach that swallowed the rule. He made the prohibition of none effect. Paul’s words clearly violate Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32. James and Jesus both say eating meat sacrificed to idols is flatly prohibited and *wrong*. There are no excuses, hairsplitting qualifications, situational-ethics, or easy outs in deciding whether *to obey God*. It is *wrong* and prohibited.

Paul Clearly Teaches It is Permissible to Eat Idol Meat

Yet, Paul teaches it is permissible to eat idol meat. This is transparent enough that Pauline Christians admit Paul is saying meat sacrificed to idols is clean and permissible. They make these admissions apparently unaware that Jesus in Revelation reconfirmed the prohibition on meat sacrificed to idols.⁵ A Presbyterian pastor unwittingly admits:

Paul says to his readers that ***even though there is no ontological or theological basis for refusing to eat meat that has been sacrificed to an idol***, nevertheless out of consideration for brothers and sisters in Christ for whom it

5. Kenneth Loy, Jr. in *My Body His Temple: The Prophet Daniel’s Guide to Nutrition* (Aroh Publishing: 2001) at 69 writes: “***Idol Meat Is Clean*** (Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8): God had forbidden idol meat originally because it caused the children of Israel to go ‘whoring after’ the gods of other nations. (Exodus 34:15-16.) Since the Gentiles were now equal in the sight of God, this ***restriction was no longer necessary***. Jewish Christians even preferred idol meat since it was usually less expensive in the market place....**Paul stipulates another reason why idol meat is permitted**: ‘As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one....’ (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).”

was a great problem and in an effort to be sensitive to their struggles, a Christian should be willing to abstain [from idol meat].⁶

This pastor unwittingly destroys Paul's validity for a person who wants to obey Jesus Christ.

Paul's Antinomianism on Idol Meat Issue versus Jesus

What do we do then with such absolute commands as Jesus gave against eating meat sacrificed to idols? Jesus clearly threatens spewing out of His mouth those committing such deeds.

Modern Paulinists find no problem. First, they apparently share the young Luther's view that the Book of Revelation is noncanonical. Thus, they do not regard Jesus' prohibition on eating meat sacrificed to idols as a hurdle for Paul to overcome. Then what of Exodus' commands (Ex. 34:13-16) designed to prevent eating idol meat? Paulinists defend Paul's position that eating idol meat is permissible by saying the Law was abolished. They then insist this means that any legalistic notion to not eat meat sacrificed to idols was abolished. In fact, these same Paulinists ridicule any first century Christian who would have tried to enforce the command against eating such meats. The Law has been utterly abolished, they explain.

Dan Hill, Pastor of Southwood Bible Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, shows you that if you came to the conclusion in the first century that you should not eat idol meat, you were

6. Dr. Peter Barnes (Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Boulder, Colorado), *The Question About Christian Freedom (1 Corinthians 8:1-13)* (2002) reprinted at <http://www.fpcboulder.org/Sermons/Sermon1-27-02.htm>

in serious error. You were violating Paul's *antinomian* morality based on expediency. Pastor Hill describes the error of such a first century crusader against eating such meat:

So you start a crusade, you get a banner, get others to march, you picket the temple and the shambles, you chant, you sing, you light candles, you campaign against the ***sin of eating the idol's meat.***

And remember, you have some ***pretty good verses to use on this matter.*** You can pull them out and get very dogmatic about what God thinks (or what you think He thinks).

Then you go to Bible Class one day and there the Pastor is reading ***Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians.*** And you find out that... you... have liberty [because Paul teaches]:

'All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient [*i.e.*, Paul's axiom].'

You were wrong, especially in trying to force your decision upon others.

But you would have even been more wrong in thinking that ***you had to figure out what God thinks... that is part of the fatal assumption of the Law.***⁷

Thus, Pastor Hill affirms antinomianism as why Paul said it was permissible to eat meat sacrificed to idols. There is no law. There are no absolute principles. ***Your first mistake was to think there are any laws.*** There is just a question of what is expedient. Eating idol meat is only wrong if it is *inex-*

7. Pastor Dan Hill, *Romans 6:14* (Grace Notes) (reprinted at <http://www.realtime.net/~wdoud/romans/rom26.html>)

pedient to do so. Eating such meat might set you back in evangelism or offend another Christian. It might become *inexpedient* temporarily. Otherwise, there are no absolute rules against eating such meat.⁸

What Pastor Hill is saying is that had he been alive in the first century, he would admonish the 'trouble-maker' Christian. 'Stop trying to make people avoid eating meat sacrificed to idols!' Pastor Hill would not admonish the one eating the meat. They are OK. He would scold you if you said it was wrong to eat such meat.

Unwittingly, Pastor Hill helps us prove how to interpret Jesus' response. Jesus is looking at Paul's entire outlook on the Law. Paul's broader message is because there is no Law any longer, it is permissible to eat such meat. Paul, in fact, says James' command in Acts 15:20 against eating such meat is not binding. The Laws of Exodus are not directed to God's people. You apply an expediency test whether to follow it or not. Jesus was the end of the Law, as Paul says. (Rom. 10:4.)

Jesus' remarks prove Pastor Hill's notion cannot possibly be true. Jesus is angry to the hilt in Revelation 2:6, 14. He is upset that Christians are being told they can commit fornication. He is furious they are told they can eat meat sacrificed to idols. If there is no more strict Law for Christians, and just expediency is the test, then Jesus' words are pointless. We are covered. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1.) Jesus apparently had not read that passage. He didn't 'learn' its truth. Instead, Jesus is full of condemnation for Christians who violate *laws*!

8. If you live by Paul's principles, it is totally acceptable to outwardly behave in a manner that does not offend others, while inwardly you do not have to live and believe those principles. What did Jesus repeatedly say to the Pharisees who reasoned to the same conclusion as Paul? Jesus' response is in Mat 23:28: "Even so you also *outwardly appear righteous to men*, but *inwardly* you are full of *hypocrisy* and iniquity." (WEB)

In truth, Jesus in Revelation chapter 2 is clearly attacking *antinomianism*. He is laying down absolutes on fornication and eating meat sacrificed to idols. Jesus is highlighting the error of the Nicolaitans. They were known from Irenaeus' writings to be antinomians. Irenaeus said they believed they could eat any foods. The Nicolaitans taught the Law was abrogated and they lived under grace instead.⁹

Jesus' attack on antinomianism is also obvious from Jesus' condemnation of the permissiveness on the issue of fornication. Jesus is not only prohibiting fornication at idol worship ceremonies, as a few Paulinists contend. To save Paul's validity, some seriously contend Jesus meant to prohibit fornication only at idolatrous ceremonies. However, no such limitation can be found in the text. The fornication prohibition is stated just as absolutely as the prohibition on eating meat sacrificed to idols. There are no exceptions. There are no plausible hairsplitting arguments that can construe Jesus as only prohibiting fornicating at a pagan ceremony. (If true, it would imply Jesus permitted fornication otherwise.) This spin to save Paul leads to absurdities.

Thus, one cannot read into Jesus' words any expediency-test on eating meat sacrificed to idols any more than you could read such a test into Jesus' words condemning fornication.

Apostle John, who is the human hand of Revelation, took Jesus' attack on antinomianism to heart. He later wrote likewise that those who say they know Jesus but disobey His commands are liars. John's attack on antinomianism appears in 1 John:

2:4 He that saith, I know him, and ***keepeth not his commandments, is a liar***, and the truth is not in him.***3:10...whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.... (ASV)

9. See text and footnote on page 121.

Conclusion

John and Jesus are encouraging strictly following Jesus' commands. This includes His command to not eat meat sacrificed to idols. Apostle John has a harsh message for those *who claim to know Jesus but who refute His commands*. You are a liar when you say you know Jesus. Who else is called a *liar* by John's pen? The one who told the Ephesians falsely he was an apostle of Jesus. (Rev. 2:2.) We shall see that it is no accident 1 John 2:4 would affix the label *liar* to Paul for his contradiction of Jesus' command on idol meat. Revelation 2:2 affixes the same label of *liar* to someone the Ephesians put on trial for claiming to be an apostle and found he was not one. (See the chapter entitled "Did Jesus Applaud the Ephesians for Exposing Paul as a False Apostle?" on page 215 *et seq.*)

Conclusion

In light of the foregoing blatant contradiction by Paul of Jesus, who seriously can hold onto Paul any longer as an inspired person? Who can really believe he is a true apostle?

Jesus is pointing his arrow at Paul who is long gone when the book of Revelation is written. Unquestionably, Paul had been teaching others to violate Jesus' commands and the commands of the twelve apostles. It is blatant. Jesus takes Paul's teaching to task.

This brings to mind Jesus' 'fruit' test for a false prophet. In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus says:

(15) Beware of false prophets, who come to you in *sheep's clothing*, but inwardly are ravening wolves. (16) *By their fruits ye shall know them*. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? (17) Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth *evil fruit*.

Thus, when Paul teaches someone to violate Jesus' commands to not eat meat sacrificed to idols, is this good fruit or evil fruit? Obviously evil fruit. Jesus says "beware those who come in sheep's clothing." (Matt. 7:15.) What is a *sheep* in that verse? A Christian. Beware those who come claiming to be a Christian but who have *evil fruit*. Paul fits both criteria. Jesus then continues, saying even if they come with signs and wonders, He will tell those who work *anomia* (negation of Mosaic Law) that He never knew them. (Matt. 7:23.)

How many ways must Jesus say it before we recognize He is talking about Paul?