

## Did the New Testament Do Away With God's Unclean Animal Restrictions?

- **Acts 9:43–10:48**      Overarching context: Cornelius is a centurion of the Italian Cohort in Cæsarea, known for his devotion and piety. God honors him (1) with a vision directing him to come into contact with Peter, and (2) with the gift of the Holy Spirit as a sign of God's acceptance of the Gentiles. Peter baptized him and his household as the first uncircumcised Gentiles officially received into the Christian church.  
The point: God's embrace includes all people groups. No group has special privileges that exclude other groups from Christ's salvation.
- **Acts 9:43–10:8**      Context: An angel directs Cornelius while in vision to seek Peter in Joppa.  
The point: God has great plans for this pious Gentile, whereas the Jews (who made up the nucleus of the fledgling Christian church) had historically excluded Gentiles from religious or personal contact, as being unclean.
- **Acts 10:9–16**      Context: Peter has a vision concerning clean and unclean.  
The point: While he assumes the vision has to do with accepting as food that which God specifically ruled as unclean and thus unfit for human consumption (see Leviticus 11:4–8, 10–20, 23–47; Deuteronomy 14:3, 7, 8, 10, 12–19, 21), the realization that his personal biases need to be removed doesn't dawn on him until the drama unfolds further. "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (verse 15) refers not to food at all but to the Jewish attitude toward Gentiles as "common" rabble, shut out from God's covenant.
- **Acts 10:17–43**      Context: Peter goes to Cæsarea and instructs Cornelius.  
The point: Notice that Peter comes out of his biases gradually. First, he has doubts as to the meaning of his vision (verse 17), next he comes into physical contact with Cornelius (verses 25, 26), and finally he disavows his former belief, saying to this Gentile: "Ye know how that it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (verse 28). Peter's confession couldn't be more unmistakable: His vision was not about the removal of dietary restrictions at all; rather it was about the removal of self-imposed prejudicial restrictions against other persons.
- **Acts 10:44–48**      Context: Cornelius and his company are baptized.  
The point: The miracle of divine grace radically alters Peter's exclusive attitude while also drawing into God's family a whole new body of believers.

To answer the question, Did the New Testament do away with God's unclean animal restrictions? we discover that Peter's vision of the sheet, far from condoning a change in mere diet, has to do with a change of human attitudes. We would have to go outside Scripture to find any authorization for dietary change, and that would be venturing upon shaky ground indeed. Think about this: God would have had to change the very nature of unclean animals in order for them to become clean. Scavengers and bottom feeders perform a necessary function to prevent the spread of disease by dead and decaying organisms, but in the process they themselves become unfit for secondary human consumption. The old saying remains true: We are what we eat. Let us thank an all-wise God for (1) providing plenty of clean food, and (2) for including every human being as a potential subject of His everlasting kingdom.— Jerry A. Stevens, October 26, 2005