

Based on recent media coverage of the selling of *halal* meat by British supermarkets, I have been requested to make a statement:

## What is *halal* meat?

The word “*halal*” means lawful in Arabic. The term is used to designate food or an object as seen as permissible according to Islamic (*Sharia*) law. A recent Mail on Sunday investigation found Sainsbury’s, Tesco, Somerfield, the Co-op, Waitrose and Marks and Spencer (M&S) all stock *halal* meat without marking it as such on the packaging

*Halal* meat is prepared according to *Sharia* law by cutting an animal’s throat while a Muslim butcher recites a religious verse from the *Quran*<sup>a</sup>. *Halal* food is prepared in a very similar way to *koscha* food for the Jews

## What Does the Scripture Say?

According to Old Testament law, Jews were forbidden to eat certain foods, in particular, blood (i.e. meat still with the blood in it). Jewish meat was prepared in a similar way to that of *halal* meat:

- The priests were the butchers
- They confessed the Law as they slaughtered and prepared the meat
- All meat was drained of its blood

Therefore, what should our stance as Christians be towards eating *halal* or *koscha* meat?

Jesus said the following:

### **Matt 15:10-11**

<sup>10</sup> ... "Listen and understand. <sup>11</sup> What goes into a man's mouth does not make him `unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him `unclean.' "

What about meat sacrificed to idols?

When Gentiles became Christians it caused a stir among the Jewish believers, because they held different views on eating and preparing food. For example, Gentiles eat pork – Jews do not. A council was called in Jerusalem to address this conflict (read Acts 15). James, as head of the Jerusalem church, issued the following statement:

### **Acts 15:23-29**

<sup>23</sup> The apostles and elders, your brothers,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

<sup>24</sup> We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. <sup>25</sup> So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul-- <sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. <sup>28</sup> It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the

following requirements: <sup>29</sup> You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

If it is believed that *halal* meat is meat “sacrificed” to an idol and if we are to take this decree as binding then we should not eat *halal* meat. Similarly, we should not eat any meat with blood still in it, like rare steak or black pudding.

What was Paul’s view on this issue?

### **1 Cor 8:4-13**

<sup>4</sup> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. <sup>5</sup> For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), <sup>6</sup> yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

<sup>7</sup> But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

<sup>9</sup> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup> So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. <sup>12</sup> When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

## **Conclusion**

Therefore, we suggest that eating *halal* food or not eating *halal* food is point of conscience. If it violates one’s conscience to eat it then he should avoid doing so. If one feels, by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, that it is of no significance, then he should be free to eat *halal* food.

Jesus came to set us free from the law of sin and death but we are warned not indulge in sin:

### **Gal 5:13**

<sup>13</sup> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

However, the fact that the supermarkets do not label their packages as *halal* does violate our right to know what we’re eating. To this end we are called to test everything and hold onto the good by avoiding evil (1 Thes 5:21).

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<sup>a</sup> A possible verse from the Qur’an that may be recited at the slaughter of animals under *Sharia* law: “O ye who believe! Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you and render thanks to Allah, if it is He whom we worship” (*Qur-an Chapter II Verse 172*).