What Parts of Clean Animals are We Forbidden to eat?

The Bible says specifically which animals we may eat, and which we must not eat. A list of those "clean" and "unclean" animals can be found in several places, including in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. According to the Bible, such "popular" animals as pigs or swine, hares, rabbits, lobsters, shellfish, shark, or clams, are labeled "unclean" and are not to be eaten -- even today.

In addition, the Bible specifically points out that we are not to eat blood or fat, even from clean animals. Leviticus 7:23-27 states:

"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'You shall not eat any fat, of ox or sheep or goat. And the fat of an animal that dies naturally, and the fat of what is torn by wild beasts, may be used in any other way; but you shall by no means eat it. For whoever eats the fat of the animals of which men offer an offering made by fire to the LORD, the person who eats it shall be cut off from his people. Moreover you shall not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, whether of bird or beast. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people."

Beyond this, the Bible does not contain a specific prohibition to eat any parts of clean animals, including liver, kidney, heart, tongue, or stomach.

The Church of the Eternal God and its corporate affiliates in Great Britain and Canada have concluded, after a careful study of the pertinent Scriptures, that it is up to individual choice whether someone wants to eat, or abstain from the consumption of certain parts of clean animals. At the last ministerial conference, the following was included in our minutes:

"The Bible plainly says that we should not eat blood, fat or unclean meat. Apart from that, it is up to individual choice. It must never defile conscience."

Some have concluded that liver or heart can be eaten, but not kidneys, as the priests did sacrifice the kidneys to God. However, the Bible does not tell us why this was done, and to conclude, from Scripture, that it therefore constitutes a prohibition to eat kidneys stretches the Biblical account. We must note that while God specifically states that we are not to eat fat or blood, He does not give us such a prohibition for other parts of clean animals. Notice carefully God's prohibition in Leviticus 3:14-17:

"Then he shall offer from it his offering, as an offering made by fire to the LORD. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is on the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; and the priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma; all the fat is the LORD's. This shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall eat neither fat nor blood."

The above-quoted passage refers to the peace offerings -- "the only offering in which the offeror shared by eating a portion of the sacrifice... The animal could be an unblemished male or female ox (3:1), lamb, or goat (vv. 7, 12)... No mention is made of a peace offering of birds" (Ryrie Study Bible). The above-quoted passage pointed out that kidneys were to be burnt as a sacrifice, but when God gave the prohibition as to what not to eat, He only mentioned fat and blood, not kidneys (compare verse 17).

In Leviticus 7:1-10, the trespass offering is mentioned, which was to be made from a ram, as Leviticus 5:15 establishes. The priests were to eat from the meat, after doing the following: "... all the fat thereof; the rump, and the fat that covereth the inwards, And the two kidneys, and the fat that is on them, which is by the flanks, and the caul that is

above the liver [the fatty membrane surrounding the liver], with the kidneys, it shall he take away: And the priest shall burn them on the altar for an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a trespass offering (AV)." This passage does not include at all a prohibition to eat kidneys in general -- apart from the context of a trespass offering -- and even the trespass offering itself refers specifically only to a ram.

We are therefore not compelled to conclude that kidneys must not be eaten. Some feel that the definition of fat in the passages above includes kidneys, but this interpretation has been rejected by others, as going beyond the clearly revealed Word of God. If, however, somebody would eat kidneys and thereby defile his or her conscience, believing that they should not be eaten for religious or health reasons, then, of course, consumption of such food must be avoided (compare Romans 14:23).

Recently, we were asked the question whether chicken gizzards are fit to eat. According to the dictionary, a gizzard is "the second stomach of a bird, where food is broken up with the help of small stones the bird has swallowed."

Since chicken is a permissible food, there is no reason to prohibit eating gizzards. The Bible does not say one way or the other, specifically, so it boils down to an individual decision. Some cut up gizzards and put them in Giblet Gravy for use with turkey and dressing at Thanksgiving. Others don't eat them mainly because they are really tough to chew and one can certainly understand why, since they are used by the chicken in its digestive process. On the other hand, some like to eat them -- or the stomach of the chicken -- in chicken soup, and there is no Biblical prohibition -- barring individual conscience -- against doing so.