

Romans 14, Judging, Food, And Sin

To Eat or Not to Eat

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Given 18-Aug-12; Sermon #1116c

Spiritual problems involving food, eating, and sin are as ancient as Adam and Eve. The very first warning that God gives to mankind was that to Adam and Eve, that they were not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil or they would die. But they did eat, anyway. So all of mankind, in the person of Adam and Eve, sinned. The first involved eating what they were specifically told not to eat.

Food and life are very close to mankind because most of mankind eats two or three times a day. Energy and life not only depend upon what God has made, but also He made it very enjoyable to eat.

The next recorded sin, that involving Cain and Abel, also indirectly involves food for mankind because some portion of the offerings made to God were shared with the offerer so that he could eat.

In Genesis 9, God qualifies in a general way what can and cannot be eaten. He set clear limits. It is in this chapter that He clarifies that meat can be part of mankind's diet, but we must not eat the blood of the animal killed for food out of respect for its life.

In Leviticus 11, the very first extensive labeling of what we should and should not eat is given by God.

Mankind's history clearly shows that people will eat virtually anything. I saw a picture on Thursday afternoon of people roasting huge spiders, eight inches in diameter, over a fire like you'd roast marshmallows in preparation for eating them. In Leviticus 11, God clearly labels such a thing as an abomination, as unclean and defiling—He uses all three terms, putting spiders in the same category as pigs, skunks, horses, camels, rabbits, squirrels, sharks, eagles, dolphins, shrimp, lobster, bears, dogs, oysters, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Like God, our governments today require labeling of some of the ingredients contained (or hidden, we might say), within processed foods. The overwhelming majority of what is within are additives, placed to color, enhanced the flavor of and the nutrition of it, and preserve it from deterioration so that it might sit on the shelf longer and thus remain saleable longer.

It is interesting to me that one cannot see the overwhelming majority of the additives. On the other hand, by contrast, God makes it very clear that one can see on the outside of what He has created the labeling that announces that we can or cannot eat that. For instance, split hoofs, the animal must chew the cud, and fish must have fins and scales. You get the point. They're easily seen. What we can eat is easily identified.

The things that God created to be eaten by all of mankind have been that way from the very beginning. Thus, the food laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy remain in effect. God made clear to Cain and Abel what they were permitted to sacrifice, and the reason: Every animal sacrifice required a clean animal. Some of the sacrifices symbolized God eating what was offered to Him, thus showing that God would eat only those offerings that were clean for both Him and man to eat, thus showing that He abided by His own laws, though He was and is God.

In our age, we are confronted by a challenge not faced by mankind until this technological age. Because of mankind's misguided experimentation to produce greater abundance of foods and profits through technological experimentation, things like meat and grains we formally could eat without danger—because they were made specifically for us by our Creator—are no longer what God created. They may still look the same, but they have in many cases become, to some measure, indigestible and thus, over an extended period of time, build toxicity within one's body, thus triggering diseases of a chronic nature. Now, should we eat those things or cut them from our diet?

We are not the first in this age to face this challenge. It was a challenge even when Herbert Armstrong was alive and he spoke on it. However, is more prevalent now than it was then. In fact, the problem is worse. It is still a problem, though, with no clear solution.

How many of us live in a fairly large city, and our job in this time of high unemployment and economic downturn is also located there? Thus, we are in no position to buy a small farm, move to it, grow our own fruits, vegetables, beef, sheep, goats—to do so, brethren, might be a big gamble and might be tempting God. How many of us have incomes large enough to shop at a store that sells all organically grown fruits and vegetables, and their beef is only grass-fed, without hormones. They have raw milk. Absolutely pure water is also available. I think you get the drift, and the drift is, we can run, but we cannot hide. There are ways of meeting some of these challenges, but people in the Church of the Great God who are prepared to meet them are few and far between.

I just read an article that gave some hope—if it can be believed. That article said that some large grocers claim they do not yet buy GMO corn, for instance. Unfortunately, this circumstance sets people up to become judges to other brethren in the church, some because some *can* and to some degree some *cannot* adjust. So we have a possible division there between those who can and those who cannot.

Romans 14 becomes helpful when people have made sincere efforts but cannot get the best food available. In that chapter, Paul first reminds us that this food issue discussed there is not a major doctrinal issue. It is what Paul calls a "doubtful thing" (Romans 14:1) He implies as the chapter moves on that the issue does not involve food God terms as unclean. The issue is a personal one, and it is peripheral, not central to salvation. One's salvation is not on the line. He reminds us, as the chapter moves toward its conclusion, that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). He urges us, "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food" (Romans 14:20) by making harsh judgements of what others eat. He concludes by urging us to make sure that our own conscience is clear before God.

Mr. Armstrong's basic advice many years ago was this: "Do the best you can within your circumstance, but we should make efforts to find and eat the best. Buy what you can afford."

Be thankful that God has not permitted men to make the food deadly poisonous quickly. It takes a while for the toxicity to build up, and then even that is a two-edged sword. He has also made it possible for reasonably good food to be found. Remember, He promises in I Corinthians 10:13 that He faithfully provides a way of escape. So learn not to take these things for granted. Be thankful for what you do have, and always pray at every meal.