

But Jesus Ate Fish!

By Frank Zimmerman

Some time ago, I participated in a survey conducted to see what reasons there are behind a community or group decision to adopt a vegetarian diet.

I gave the reasons for why my church has made this choice.

The answer I gave is the substance of this post.

IN THE Sabbath Rest Advent Church, two things are at the heart of everything we teach, believe, and practice:

- the character of God, and
- the law of God.

These are actually the same; the law of God is a revelation of His character. This character is self-sacrificing love, giving of self for the sake of others; therefore,

Romans 13

¹⁰ ...love is the fulfilling of the law.

Since we believe that the law is a transcript of God's own character, we also believe that God keeps His own law. His kingdom is not like earthly rulers, where there is often one law for the people, and another law for the king; but God asks us to be like Him (*Leviticus* 11:44), and therefore when He bids us to obey the law, it is only because He Himself does the same.

We also believe that since God commanded men not to kill (*Exodus* 20:13), therefore God, in the exercise of His judgment, also does not personally kill men. But this is another topic and we have a book devoted to this subject.¹

We do not extend this rule to animals, since the last six of the ten commandments deals with human relationships, but we look upon the death of animals as a result of man's sin. When God commanded men to offer sacrifices of animals, they were by that act not only confessing their trust in a Saviour, but they were also confessing that their sin had consequences which extended to the

¹ See the book, *Behold Your God*.

lower orders of creation. God was not advocating the senseless slaughter of animals.

Sin entered by the distortion of the character and law of God. It will exit when those things are revealed in their true beauty again. Jesus revealed the character of God in it's fulness, and therefore exalted the law also. Jesus Christ spoke through the Psalmist when He said,

Psalm 40

⁸ I delight to do Your will, O my God, yes, Your law is within my heart,

–or in another place,

Isaiah 42

²¹ He will magnify the law and make it honorable.

This revelation dealt a mighty blow to Satan's kingdom (see *Revelation 12:10-13*, *Genesis 3:15*), since that kingdom only exists by misrepresentation of God's character.

But while Christ's death restricted Satan's access, it did not finish the rebellion. The final blow will be dealt by Christ through His people in these latter days (*Romans 16:20*), when they give the same example, and do the same work that Jesus did. Therefore, Jesus is the pattern and the way. "Jesus and Jesus only" (*Acts 4:12*) is the one authority recognized in His church.

Now how does that all fit in with vegetarianism? By the term "vegetarian," I'm assuming that healthful vegetarian choices of food are meant, as it is possible to eat just candy and potato chips and still be called a "vegetarian"...this is not what I mean!

There are many reasons for being vegetarian, especially in our time:

1. Health of body and mind;
2. Minimization of suffering to animals;
3. Minimization of damage to the environment;

4. More efficient use of the world's resources (so the poor and starving can have enough food also);
5. Control of appetite, and denial of unhealthful lusts;
6. Rebuking the excesses of our time.

We would agree with all of them, because all of them are part of the revelation of God's character of love.

1 Corinthians 13

⁵ Love seeks not her own.

Therefore, love will make choices with respect to the welfare of others. Since there are nearly 1 billion people in this world who do not have enough food and nutrition, and since it takes about 10 times more land and much more resources to raise animal food, it is obvious which choice Love would make.

This becomes even more important when we consider that animal flesh, especially since the advent of industrial pollution, the use of growth hormones and antibiotics, and factory farm practices, has become more dangerous to eat.

“But Jesus ate fish!”

Some have argued that since Jesus ate fish, therefore it is good for Christians *at all times*.

This is a standard argument, but if closely examined, it shows itself to be merely an excuse; a fig-leaf garment to cover sin. It confuses the vessel and treasure. Those same people do not argue that we should wear robes and sandals in order to imitate Jesus! No, it is the principles that we must apply in our day. The vessel can change, but the treasure must remain the same.

2 Corinthians 4

⁷ We have this treasure in earthen vessels.

Jesus' teachings and principles are the treasure. The vessel are those things that were available and appropriate to present the spiritual principles in His day. Jesus chose food such as fish and loaves because in His day they were:

- healthy
- simple
- available to all including the poorest

Therefore, what type of food would convey the same lessons of health, simplicity, and availability to all in our day? Clearly, a vegetarian diet. It is the only kind of diet that could provide proper nourishment for the billions upon earth, using the available farm land.

In Jesus' time there was no electricity, no methods to easily distribute food over thousands of miles, and no easy refrigeration methods. What would we eat if we had no supermarkets, and no refrigerators? An animal was like a walking refrigerator! It provided an easy way to store food, that could be used when needed.

So in His day, fish was a natural, and possibly even necessary choice. It was not polluted with mercury and other heavy metals, and there were no dangerous depletion of fishing stocks by the peasant fisherman of those days.

But in our day, with depleted fish stocks, mercury pollution, and over-indulgence by people in wealthy countries, fish would be a very poor choice. It could not possibly convey the same lesson it did in Jesus' time.

Therefore, it is very easy to know what Christ would do if He were here today...He would not support over-indulgence, exploitation, poor health, and destruction of natural resources. These would all be contrary to the principles of love.

The Bible can be used as a book to make us more like Him, or it can be used in such a way as to provide excuses for sin.

We would extend the argument to say that we should not only avoid animal food, but all food that is refined and made to entice the lustful appetite by the over-use of fat, sugar, salt, and unnatural flavorings. None of these cater to the health of the body, and therefore cannot make it a fit vessel for service to others.

In Jesus' time, he cleansed the earthly temple from the buyers and sellers who were making merchandise of the people. But the Bible also refers to our bodies as the temple of God. The "buyers and sellers" in our body temple would be those foods which are sold to us simply to make money and appeal to lustful appetite, but which unfit the body for service to God by bringing in weakness, sickness, and disease.

And the same counsel that Jesus gave regarding the earthly temple,

John 2

¹⁶ Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise,

—would be spoken regarding the similar misuse of the body temple in our day:

“Take these unfit foods away, and do not allow the body temple to be used by profit-driven food corporations and factory farms who minister to the lusts of the flesh.”

*“Love works no ill to his neighbor,
therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law.”*

Romans 13:10

*“Here are they that
keep the commandments of God,
and the faith of Jesus.”*

Revelation 14:12