

International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: All About Food

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve and the means to keep them alive. God created food. At first, the food came from plants.

Then God said, "I am giving you every plant on the face of the whole earth that produces its own seeds. I am giving you every tree that has fruit with seeds in it. All of them will be given to you for food. ~Genesis 1:29

*Describe the source of food given to the first man and woman.
What food is not given?*

From Adam until Noah, about 10 generations, people only ate food from plants. They were vegetarian. After Noah got off the ark, God told Noah to eat meat.

The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. ~Genesis 9:2-3

We are not told why the change was made but only that now eating meat was given as a source of food.

When Moses wrote down the law for Israel, rules about food seemed to change once more. Israel was still allowed to eat meat, but now there were restrictions about what could not be eaten. Eating "unclean" meat could cause one to be unclean, or impure before God. Leviticus 11 describes these animals.

You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud. The pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you.

Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams you may eat any that have fins and scales. ¹⁰ But all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales—you are to regard as unclean.

These are the birds you are to regard as unclean and not eat because they are unclean: the eagle, the vulture...

Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper. ²³ But all other flying insects that have four legs you are to regard as unclean.

Of the animals that move along the ground, these are unclean for you: the weasel, the rat, any kind of great lizard, ³⁰ the gecko, the monitor lizard, the wall lizard, the skink and the chameleon.... ~Leviticus 11

*Name animals that were considered "clean" and "unclean" for Israel to eat.
What are some animals that your culture would not eat?*

When Jesus spoke about food, he hinted that the food restrictions for Jewish people would undergo a change. When confronting the religious leaders about their hypocrisy of telling people to live one way and then doing something else themselves, Jesus turns to the crowd and tells them,

Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." **(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)** ~Mark 7:14-19

Restate what Jesus tells the crowd in your own words.

How is this different from the Old Testament teaching about foods?

One must ask, why is Jesus saying all foods are now clean? The answer lies in the creation of the church as God's way to spread the good news about Jesus and his love. In the Old Testament, Israel was God's way to let the nations know about his love and holiness in part through laws that have to do with certain foods that were restricted. But when Jesus died, the rules about unclean food was lifted along with laws about animal sacrifices. The following Scripture suggests why the lifting of food restrictions was necessary.

Christ himself is our peace. He has made Jews and Gentiles into one group of people. He has destroyed the hatred that was like a wall between us. Through his body on the cross, Christ set aside the law with all its commands and rules. He planned to create one new people out of Jews and Gentiles. ~Ephesians 2:14-15

Restate these verses in your own words.

"The law with all its commands and rules," is not speaking about the law where we are commanded to love God and our neighbor, but about the rules regarding food, clothing, washings, and sacrifices. Considering the necessity of Jew and Gentile cooperating as the church, why do you think it was important to lift previous regulations?

Later on, Paul, in 1 Timothy 4 restates what Jesus taught about foods. All foods can now be consumed if a person can be thankful for it.

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

These ideas were not easily accepted by the early church. Like anything else, it takes time to change. The early church struggled to learn how to work together as one body coming from different cultural backgrounds. Discuss the following questions.

What attitude do you think a Christian should have toward their own cultural background and the cultural background of others?

Is it possible for people from different cultural backgrounds to appreciate and work together in unity for the sake of the gospel? What difficulties have and will arise?

What do you envision a united church from many cultural backgrounds would look like?

