**DIETARY RESTRICTIONS**

*By A Guest Writer*

I am often asked about whether I have any food allergies or other dietary limitations. I regularly see warnings on restaurant menus with requests to inform the servers, and I am asked about it when I’m invited over to someone’s home for a meal. It’s a very nice courtesy and I appreciate it. For me, the only restriction is whether the food will fit into my mouth. That excludes very little…

Americans tend to consider themselves blessed to have easy access to a great variety of food. Back in 2005, my wife and I traveled to Zimbabwe. There was an economic crisis there at that time and the grocery stores were literally empty. There were restrictions in place all right – pretty much the entire food supply. What a contrast. I’m not so sure America’s many abundances are true blessings – I think we are just spoiled and take way too much for granted. Too much food is not a blessing at all.

**As children of God, we have two diets to manage.**

One is our physical appetite; the second is our spiritual.

First, our physical appetite. Ever wonder why we hear so little about gluttony in the assembly these days? I think we know why. This isn’t a pleasant topic, but it’s very clear that as a culture, we eat way too much. The evidence is in open view. It impacts our health and how we age. The problem is relatively straightforward to solve, yet it steadily gets worse.

God gives us clear warnings about lusting for food: *Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father* (Proverbs 28:7) and *put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite*. (Proverbs 23:2) Gluttony has always been a sin.

Perhaps what happened to Israel in the wilderness is the most poignant illustration of this sin. In Numbers 11, Israel rebels against the manna they received from God. Manna was very good, and the Israelites didn’t have to work to get it. God was literally feeding His people by making nutrition appear on the ground each morning! Yet they abused God’s providence by complaining harshly and demanding meat. As the saying goes – be careful what you ask for! God gave Israel meat in abundance and then punished them with a plague. Consider why He punished them: *because they “yielded to intense craving*.” (Numbers 11:4) Our human nature tends to excuse such lust, but God does not.

*Yielding to craving is sin*. It’s a sin for me, and it’s a sin for you. Let that sink in.

The second diet we are responsible for managing is our spiritual nourishment. On this diet, our nation is starving to death. Ironic, isn’t it? Nowhere in scripture will you find even at hint of anything like spiritual gluttony. Quite the opposite in fact. In John 6, Jesus spoke of Himself as the bread of life that was much better than manna:

*Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die."*

(John 6:32-35, 47-50)

Familiar words, aren’t they? Familiar and beautiful, yet even many in the kingdom of God are spiritually malnourished. Christians do not pray enough, read scripture enough, and worship and study together enough. Many even admit it! People fill their plates at the potluck, yet their cupboards are almost bare of God’s Truth. Their diet plans are reversed.

Hear God’s plea to His people:

*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; and you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance*. (Isaiah 55:1-2)

Are we *listening carefully* to our God exactly as He lovingly tells us to? Why is it that so many of us eat way too much food and end up harming ourselves with what tastes good to our tongues, but take only a little of the priceless abundance found only in His Word? God wants our souls to delight in that nourishment and be eternally satisfied! Do we really think the blessings of God’s abundance is just a full refrigerator?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said those who *hunger and thirst for righteousness* are blessed indeed! They shall be filled! (Matthew 5:6) Regarding this eternally essential kind of nourishment, intense craving is encouraged, and “spiritual overeaters” are to be praised.

Any restrictions we experience in our spiritual diet are all self-imposed and very bad for the soul. Do you really hunger and thirst for righteousness, for God’s word, and for the Bread of Life? I sincerely hope so! Open your Bible and feed your mind with the true wisdom of the Word and your heart with the love of God. You will prosper in your life as a disciple and prevail in your battle against temptation and sin. Please join me at God’s dinner table!