



Connecting With God For a Strong Finish

So we'll be Ready when the Time Comes

PART 2

How to Connect with God for Strength

CHAPTER 10

Eat for Strength from God's Menu

From the beginning, God served as menu-maker for the human race. His earliest command came bundled with a meal plan.¹ Terms and conditions governed Adam and Eve's diet with fatal consequences linked to their compliance.

In contrast, God's command to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth did not specify sexual limitations, and it did not assert consequences.² A follow up decree to subdue and rule the earth offered neither moral code nor disciplinary recourse. Yet, eating a forbidden fruit warranted the death penalty—a penalty with high-impact and long-range implications.

Our food supply was never a trivial issue with our Creator. He used food to reveal heart attitudes. At key season changes throughout history, God announced new menus to facilitate progress in our developing relationship. Biblical commands have more to do with perfecting our love than perfecting our behavior. Obeying the word of God

¹ Genesis 1:28-30

² Genesis 1:28 ESV

refines our spiritual disposition and validates our love. John put it this way:

*whoever **keeps his word**, in him truly **the love of God is perfected**.
By this we may know that we are in him (1 John 2:5 ESV)*

The rules may have changed but God's primary objective remains the same—to draw us closer to Him.

*For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, **a better hope** is introduced, **through which we draw near to God**. (Hebrews 7:18-19 ESV)*

Obedying God's command conveys a relational priority rooted in love. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments".³ John reaffirms this priority established through knowledge of the truth:

*And by this we know that we have come to **know him**, if we **keep his commandments**. (1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we **love God** and **observe His commandments**. For this is the love of God, that we **keep His commandments**; and His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:2-3 ESV)*

Conditions and Consequences Associated with God's Menus

1. Eden's Menu: Seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees

*Then God said, "I give you **every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth** and **every tree that has fruit with seed in it**. They will be yours for food. (Genesis 1:29 NIV)*

Eden's Condition: Avoid fruit from one tree

*And the Lord **God commanded** the man, saying, "from any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but **from the tree of the knowledge***

³ John 14:15 ESV

of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:16-17 NAS)

Eden’s Penalty: Eating forbidden fruit meant death

God’s initial food supply was perfect and complete. Presumably, it would have sustained Adam and Eve forever had they not sinned. Only one fruit from this vegan diet remained off limits. Nevertheless, when prompted by the serpent, Eve surmised that it too was good for food and profitable for gaining wisdom.⁴

Pure and Impure Animals

Sometime before Noah built the Ark, God distinguished between clean and unclean animals. Seven pairs of clean (or pure) animals boarded Noah’s massive vessel while only one pair of unclean (or impure) animals boarded. God commanded Noah:

Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate, and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate, (Genesis 7:1 ESV)

On an altar honoring God, Noah sacrificed clean animals as burnt offerings.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (Genesis 8:20 ESV)

2. Menu Revisions after the Flood

After the Great Flood, God expanded the food supply significantly. In addition to green plants, He offered every living thing that moved, i.e., mammals, fish, birds, insects, and presumably reptiles and amphibians. God decreed:

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Genesis 9:3 ESV)

⁴ Genesis 3:5

After Flood Condition: May not Ingest Blood

But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. (Genesis 9:4 ESV)

After Flood Penalty: Eating or drinking blood meant alienation from God and separation from His people.

This new diet transformed lifelong vegetarians into carnivores. It introduced broad practical, social, and gastronomic changes. Similar to Eden's menu, God established one restriction; He repetitively banned the consumption of blood.⁵

3. Menu Revisions under Mosaic Law: Animals that divide the hoof and chew the cud, fish with fins and scales, and flying insects with jointed legs for hopping.

Under the Old Covenant meal plan, God classified clean (edible) and unclean (inedible) foods using anatomical distinctions and behavioral characteristics.⁶

Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat: You may eat any animal that has a divided hoof and that chews the cud. (Leviticus 11:2-3 NIV)

Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams you may eat any that have fins and scales. (Leviticus 11:9 NIV)

These are the birds you are to regard as unclean and not eat because they are unclean: [birds of prey, gulls, storks, herons, hoo-poes, and bats] (Leviticus 11:13-19 NIV)

All flying insects that walk on all fours are to be regarded as unclean by you. There are, however, some flying insects that walk on all fours that you may eat: those that have jointed legs for hopping

⁵ Genesis 9:3-4; Leviticus 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-14; 19:26; Deuteronomy 12:16; 12:23; 15:23; and Acts 15:28-29

⁶ Leviticus 11

on the ground. Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper. (Leviticus 11:20-22 NIV)

Mosaic Law Conditions: May not eat other variations of animal, fish, or insect and may not eat birds of prey, gulls, storks, herons, hoopoes, or bats.

Mosaic Law Penalty: Whoever eats unclean food becomes unclean, or ineligible to participate in a religious ritual or ceremony.

4. Menu Revisions Suitable for a New Covenant

While teaching His disciples, Jesus declared all food created by God to be clean and therefore potentially edible. He distinguished between human tradition and divine imperative. Jesus said to them,

“Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus, He declared all foods clean.) (Mark 7:18-19 NAS)

Love dominates the ruling passion of Christ—not dietary accuracy. Deviating from Mosaic Law, Jesus implied that unclean foods were in fact clean. He illustrated how much our Heavenly Father wants to cleanse every unclean heart poised to connect with Him. Love determines God’s motives. He does everything within His power to connect us permanently with His passionate love.

New Covenant Condition: Maintain a receptive and grateful heart, consecrating God’s provision by the word of God and prayer.

*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is **received with gratitude**; for it is **sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer**. (1 Timothy 4:4-5 NAS)*

New Covenant Penalty: Not clearly articulated

Since everything created by God is good, we should not reject His provision. One stipulation remains essential—we are responsible for a thankful attitude. The Kingdom of God emphasizes *“righteousness,*

peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” rather than eating and drinking specified ingredients assigned for legalistic consumption.⁷

- Before Christ came, God regulated our menu with laws
- After Christ, the Holy Spirit governs our menu with wisdom

Seek the Holy Spirit for Wisdom and Knowledge

Some plants, animals, insects, and fish are not fit for food because they are inherently poisonous to humans. Others are prone to infection by pathogens and require special preparation. Some ingredients are toxic and may be harmful when ingested, especially for developing infants and children. Credible danger adds a suitable incentive to draw near to God. It motivates us to confer with His Spirit as we apply dietary prudence.

*So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being **led by the Spirit of God**, these are sons of God. (Rom 8:12-14)*

A Perplexing Menu Change

God provided Peter with an unusual vision to stress a pivotal season change. Three times, He offered Peter unclean animals as food.⁸ While Peter regarded his options, the Lord spoke two clear but challenging phrases. He commanded, *“Arise, Peter; kill and eat”* and, *“What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy”*.⁹ God used a dietary imperative to convey the ruling passion in His heart.

As the church emerged from a cocoon of expired legalism, God used food to enlarge the mind of its principal leader. In a vision, God commanded Peter to kill and eat unclean animals. Initially, Peter boasted of

⁷ Romans 14:17

⁸ Acts 11:4-10

⁹ Acts 11:7 and 9 NAS

his compliance to Mosaic Law.¹⁰ Full of his own self-righteousness, he refused to eat God's provision. When faced with a complex legal dilemma, Peter refused to rely on the Lord's counsel and direct command.

After fulfilling the law, Jesus invaded a seemingly stable religious tradition. Dietary correctness had become a full-grown sacred cow. God placed this divisive bull on the altar and commanded Peter to kill and eat.

The Lord challenged Peter with a confusing dilemma. When Adam and Eve ate forbidden food, they died, forfeited the Tree of Life, and disconnected the human race from God. Yet, Jesus told Peter to eat unclean food forbidden by Mosaic Law. This food had remained off limits for nearly 1500 of years. Nonetheless, our Heavenly Father had instigated another menu change.

Previously Peter had operated under a Pharisaical notion, which forbade Jews from associating with foreigners or visiting them.¹¹ Mosaic Law imposed no such restrictions, yet when Peter arrived in Jerusalem, *"those who were circumcised took issue with him, saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them"*.¹² Adherence to this legalistic tradition prevented entire people groups from hearing the Father's invitation to connect with Him.

This season change empowered men and women to operate at a new level of dynamic fruitfulness. Jesus liberated His church to engage the world that He came to save. They reconnected uniformed sinners with their creator. Jesus emancipated His followers to enter Gentile homes and dine there. He commissioned them to feed malnourished souls with the knowledge of the truth. A spiritual word feast of connecting with God messages appeared on the menu.

¹⁰ Acts 11:8 NAS

¹¹ Acts 10:28 NAS

¹² Acts 11:2-3 NAS

In Christ, cross-cultural unity transcends race, ethnicity, and dietary custom. Through Peter's empty stomach, the Lord reminds us of His desire to save all people. Acceptance in God's kingdom does not depend on the consumption of clean foods; it depends on the application of God's mercy to purify unclean hearts.

Food Forbidden by the Church

A first-century council in Jerusalem issued a four-fold decree. They concluded that some abstinence was essential. Leading apostles and elders instructed Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia to:

- Abstain from food or drink polluted or defiled by its association to pagan idols
- Abstain from blood
- Abstain from eating anything strangled to death
- Abstain from sexual immorality

*“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than **these essentials**: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”* (Act 15:28-29 NAS)

Food Speaks a Powerful Message

Deported from Israel to Babylon, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah connected with God for strength and courage. Despite youthful appetites and inquisitive cravings, these expatriates set their heart to please the Lord. They refused to indulge themselves in unclean food or drink associated with pagan idolatry. Honoring God's standard for holiness, Daniel *“would not defile himself”* with Babylonian delicacies or royal wines.¹³

¹³ Daniel 1:8

Far from parental oversight, Daniel and his noble companions distinguished themselves on a self-restricted diet.¹⁴ They feared God enough to risk royal scrutiny and personal inconvenience. This unconventional diet of vegetables and water proclaimed a powerful message in a pagan culture; it asserted God's sacred wisdom and His followers' faithful devotion. Using food and drink, four men demonstrated unmistakable loyalty to their unequivocal God.

At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. (Daniel 1:15 NAS)

Eating involves Faith

Paul asserted God-inspired clarifications concerning the Council of Jerusalem's abstinence order; he stressed responsible eating habits for the sake of ongoing influence. According to Romans 14, abstinence from certain foods may not be essential for everyone. Indulging in controversial meals depends on the faith of the eater. Paul wrote:

One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. (Romans 14:2 NAS)

*Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not **eat from faith**; for whatever is not from faith is sin. (Romans 14:22-23 NKJ)*

Eating has become a matter of personal conscience before God based on spiritual maturity.

I [Paul] know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. (Romans 14:14 NAS)

¹⁴ Daniel 1:12-16

Each person carries a responsibility to evaluate what he or she eats and drinks in the context at hand. Abiding under God's scrutiny, we gain confidence to eat and drink His provision.

So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:12 NAS)

Abstinence from food and drink may be necessary during certain circumstances. This issue is not a matter of right or wrong eating standards; it involves helping others who may be weak. We have a responsibility to abstain from anything that will:

- Cause others to stumble
- Offend others
- Weaken others

Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. (Romans 14:20-21 NAS)

God puts strong and weak people together for a purpose. The strong in faith possess:

- Strong faith in God's ability to cleanse food associated with idolatry; to break curses and spells
- Strong confidence that God's word endorses freedom in Christ independently from Levitical laws
- Strong wisdom to select food that is safe to consume
- Strong knowledge to understand and identify what to eat
- Strong trust in God's power to help overcome any temptation to overindulge in food or drink
- Strong assurance in God's love and favor regardless of our dietary performance

The weak may possess:

- A weakness for gluttony or drunkenness
- A lack of self-control toward food and drink

- A lack of discipline to restrain from unwise eating or drinking habits
- Doubts to overcome temptation
- A lack of assurance in God's help
- Insecurity in making wise choices
- Fear that exposure to liberty will result in overwhelming perils
- Fear in their vulnerability to sin
- Fear in offending God by an improper dietary performance
- Fear of rejection and destruction from a legalistic image of God

This weak-strong relationship involves an evaluation process that aims to achieve certain goals. God wants us to maintain a sense of mutual encouragement, which promotes growth, while sustaining a peaceful atmosphere free of criticism and condemnation. We should promote building one another up in spiritual strength. Those who are strong accommodate the weak until they too become strong. This attitude of unity enables both the strong and weak to flourish.

*Therefore let us **pursue** the things which make for peace and **the things by which one may edify another.** (Romans 14:19 NKJ)*

Preventing the destruction of a weaker believer is more important than dietary liberty. God focuses on the attitude of the eater rather than what food to eat or avoid.

Does our choice reflect our faith or fear? What influence do our eating habits have on others? Do they promote growth or guilt? A sanctified eater is more important than sanctified food. In all things, the strong have a responsibility to help those who are weaker.

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. (Romans 15:1 NAS)

