

Vegetarianism is the practice of excluding meat from the diet. Some vegetarians also exclude other animal products, such as eggs, milk, cheese, rennet, gelatin, and honey. There are a variety of reasons that people have for being vegetarians, including health, cultural, economic, environmental, ethical (opposition to killing animals or objections to the ways in which they are slaughtered), and religious. Vegetarianism is found among many religions, including Christianity. Although what I will say here might possibly have implications for any of the other reasons for practicing vegetarianism, I specifically want to address the question of whether the Bible teaches that Christians should be vegetarians. Is there any biblical evidence that Jesus was a vegetarian? Since Jesus' death ended animal sacrifices, does this mean that Christians should no longer eat meat? Is there evidence in the Bible that God does not intend Christians to be vegetarians? Here are the questions on this subject that I have received:

Q. Was Jesus a vegetarian? Should Christians be vegetarians? Since Jesus' death ended animal sacrifices, doesn't this mean that Christians should no longer eat meat?

A. It does not at all logically follow that because God did not want animal sacrifices to continue, He did not want people to eat meat. The animal sacrifices were shadows or types of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Once the reality of His sacrifice was complete, the shadows were no longer needed. They were a part of the Old Testament which Jesus completely fulfilled and ended.

There is no evidence whatsoever that Jesus was a vegetarian. He said of Himself, "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber" (Matthew 11:19). He could not have said that of Himself if He were a vegetarian on a restricted diet of non-meats. It is also highly unlikely that he would have been accused of the exaggeration of being a glutton if He were on a restricted diet. Why did His accusers not accuse Him of being a vegetarian? He caused miracles so His disciples could catch fish (Luke 5:4-9; John 21:5-13), fed the multitudes fish (Matthew 14:17-21; 15:34-38), and could not have eaten the Passover, which He said He did do, if He did not eat lamb (Luke 22:7, 15).

If God wanted Christians to stop eating meat,

1) Jesus would not have eaten broiled fish, even *after His resurrection* (Luke 24:36-43).

2) He could not honestly say to Peter in Acts 10, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" (verse 13). He would have been guilty of tempting Peter to sin, even if only in his mind in a vision. Obviously, God would not have done such a thing, so it must have been perfectly fine in God's sight to slay and eat animals. To say otherwise is to go precisely opposite of what God says, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." All meat is clean for us to eat.

3) The leaders in Jerusalem would not, in Acts 15, have written to the Gentile converts merely to "abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled..." (verse 29) in reference to things eaten. They would have told them to stop eating meat altogether. This is true also of other Scriptures that speak of meat offered to idols. This would not have been a controversy if Christians were not eating meat at all.

4) Romans 14:2 clearly says that the brother who believes he should eat only herbs is the weak brother.

5) In 1 Timothy 4:1-5, we read, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [*didaskaliais daimoniōn*—"teachings of demons"]; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." To be a vegetarian demonstrates a weak faith, but it is permitted. To teach a religious abstinence from foods, however, is not permitted. It is called a teaching of demons.

If someone wants to be a vegetarian, he is certainly free to be one. Christians who know better, however, should not reinforce him in his weakness by implying that he is right to think people should not eat meat. Hopefully, the weak brother will grow to see that he is wrong. But when a vegetarian judges others for eating meat, or when he begins teaching falsely that Christians should be vegetarians or that

Jesus was a vegetarian, then he should be corrected as much as anyone else who teaches falsely.

I hope that I have shown that the Bible does not support the idea that Jesus was a vegetarian or that God wants Christians to not eat meat. Someone may choose to not eat meat for other reasons, such as health, and this is a matter that I won't go into. But if someone wants to be a vegetarian because he believes this is taught in the Bible, he may do so, but he should not try to convince others to follow him in his weakness.

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