

Learn to Discern Spiritual Junk Food

Some Christians are so spiritually hungry that they will swallow any teaching, even if it is unbalanced or unhealthy. We must learn to test what we hear.

We live in a day in which we are continually being made aware of what we eat. We can hardly pick up a magazine or newspaper without seeing articles and ads that remind us to eat wisely, avoid junk food, and read the labels on cans and boxes before we purchase them to confirm that the contents will be healthy for us.

But how many of us are as concerned about our spiritual diets as we are about our natural ones? Are we using discernment in choosing the material we read, the Christian programs we watch and the ministers we listen to? Are we able to distinguish between the meat and the mixture, the holy and the profane?

Many people are so used to mixture that they have lost a taste for what is pure. Lavish displays and methods of presentation have come to be more important than what is being served, and the servers more important than what they serve. Those sitting down at the spiritual “table” reason: If it looks good and multitudes are eating it, then it must be OK.

Sadly, this is often not the case. Some of what we are eating is frighteningly unhealthy. Here are a few examples of the types of spiritual junk food we are being served, along with the meat from God’s Word that we should be eating instead.

Junk food: Because God “so loved the world,” we must accept all religions in the name of love without insisting their followers repent of sin and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Meat: “ ‘For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God’ ” (John 3:17-18, NKJV).

Junk food: Apostles, prophets and pastors have absolute authority. “Because I am your leader, you are to respect and obey me without question no matter how I live or what I do.”

Meat: “Remember those who rule over you [or are the guides], who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Heb. 13:7).

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things” (Phil. 3:17-19).

Junk food: It is not necessary to deal with your sin; just think positive thoughts about yourself and others. Don’t worry, be happy.

Meat: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

Junk food: Every Christian must go back to his Jewish roots and begin keeping the holy days, feasts and festivals.

Meat: “He [Christ] is the mediator of the new covenant ... that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

Junk food: The day is coming when there will be no need for the local church. All activities pertaining to our faith lives will take place in homes or in the marketplace.

Meat: “Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

Though clearly it is people, not buildings, who constitute the church, there are many scriptures that encourage the need for a place to gather together and worship. It is in this place that we are taught and disciplined, and here that we learn to recognize and appreciate the fivefold ministries Jesus gave.

My concern is that we’ve become accustomed to eating what is set before us without questioning the source or discerning whether the fare we are being offered is good for us. And now we’re so full of junk (wrong thinking) that we’re not hungry for God and His Word anymore.

The results of eating poorly in a spiritual sense are numerous.

We forego our witness in favor of majority thinking. Popularity overrules purity. Fear of man replaces fear of God.

Acceptance translates into allowance, and love loses its power because of our fear of being judgmental or frivolous. Divorce is as common as marriage.

Regarding devotional practices, “worship” is the now word for what’s in essence a song service. Prayer is nearly neglected in the church except during conferences.

Fasting is a way to make God do something He doesn’t really want to do—or to put ourselves on the worthy page for what we want. The Word is read more as a promise box or fortune cookie

than as a guide for daily living.

Both water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism are treated as optional and are seldom preached about. Feel good and do good draws the largest crowds, and it's hard to dispute that's good news—yet it's only half the message.

What we may not realize is that our “eating habits” are killing us.

Some of us have anorexia—we're literally starving spiritually. We listen to a 20-minute message on Sunday but seldom pray or read the Bible. Some have bulimia—we go through periods of “consuming” the Word in great quantities but soon forget it because we don't apply it to our lives.

And some are gluttons—we get “fat” attending every service and conference we can find, listening to teachings on CD, and surfing the Web for as much spiritual material as we can read. But we simply store the knowledge rather than using it to grow in wisdom or advance the kingdom, even in our own lives.

Seek and Discern

So what's the answer? How do we make certain we're eating the right things?

First, we must stir up hunger in our hearts by seeking God rather than following after man. Jesus said, “‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled’” (Matt. 5:6). He did not say that we are blessed simply for being hungry, but rather for craving righteousness.

Righteousness is not something we can achieve on our own. It comes as a result of believing in Jesus and acknowledging His demonstration of God's righteousness on the cross. When we give our lives to Him, we are clothed in His righteousness. That doesn't mean we are sinless; but it does mean that we repent of our sins and put our hope and trust in God.

Second, we must learn to discern. We need discernment beyond our human understanding to enable us to tell the difference not only between the holy and the profane but also between what is God and what is simply good. How can we know that what our “favorite” teachers are saying is really God and not simply man’s ideas or majority thinking?

All Christians are called to practice discernment, which is the ability to distinguish between what is true and right, and what is false and inappropriate. The apostle John encourages us, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1, NKJV).

Paul says essentially the same thing. He tells us: “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:21-22).

And he tells us the reason we must use our discernment. It is because “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things” (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

Discernment is our first line of defense against deception. The Holy Spirit within us enables us to know whether we are facing evil from Satan or the wickedness of man. Sometimes we blame Satan for the messes in our lives when the problem is really man. Discernment helps us determine the truth about the troubles we face.

One of the gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 is the discerning of spirits. This is not clairvoyance but rather the ability to determine what spirit is at work. It is a supernatural work of God and not our human “talent” or understanding.

How do we learn to discern? We must know how to rightly divide the Word of God to bring truth to bear. Study is the hard work

that trains us for discernment.

As we faithfully give ourselves to Scripture, our minds will be renewed by the Word and we will be able to discern—to examine and approve what is good. We will begin to recognize the deception in the worldviews and belief systems we have bought into. And as we grow in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will continue to mature in the ability to see as God sees.

There are no shortcuts with God (see Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:20-24; Heb. 6:1). Paul chastises those whose lack of devotion to the Word of God prevents them from growing in Spirit-led discernment.

He says: “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:12-14).

Eating Right

The more discerning we become, the more likely we are to eat the right things. As Jesus declared, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matt. 4:4).

Centuries before, the prophet Jeremiah prayed: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name” (Jer. 15:16).

During His ministry, Jesus spoke about food that “endures to

everlasting life" (John 6:27). He claimed that those who are sustained by it will never be hungry or thirsty (see v. 35). The food He referred to was the true bread from heaven—Himself. "'I am the bread of life,'" He said. Each statement Jesus made stressed the continuing benefits of the life He brings (see John 6:35-40).

The manna God provided for the Israelites during the Exodus is a picture of Jesus as the living bread. When God's people traveled through the wilderness, they had to depend on God to provide their food supernaturally. He provided it in a way that also would teach the people something about their relationship with Him.

Every day God gave enough food for that day. No one could gather more than a day's supply. There had to be a continual, constant dependence on God; He was their only source of sustenance.

In a similar way, we are to feed on Jesus, the bread of life, daily. We are to go to Him and Him alone for all the resources and the strength we need to live our lives. We can rely on Him to provide everything we need—and to sustain us completely, physically and spiritually.

I thank God for every church in which good food is being served to His people, and I praise Him for the bona fide prophetic words that come forth and continually lift us into new realms of light.

But I pray we will learn to recognize the junk food that is sometimes offered to us. I pray we will turn aside from it so we may be partakers of His table so lavishly set for us in the presence of our enemies.

Let's lay aside our bad eating habits and begin to feast on the Word of God. Let's learn to discern and start seeking after Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness. Let's feed on Him and His revelation of Himself and discover that He is

completely satisfying.

It's time to be certain of what is pure, right and of God and to become light and salt on the earth.

Iverna Tompkins has been ministering nationally and internationally through Iverna Tompkins Ministries () for more than 45 years. She is the author of several books and is currently the chief of staff at Church for the Nations in Phoenix.