



Praise the salmon

Where there are fish, man will follow

BY CHRISTOPHER BATIN

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED ALASKA SALMON, and He found them to be good and without flaw in the primordial sea. He then created the fisherman, and that's where His headaches began. Early fishermen listened to neither the rules of God nor salmon. This apparent lack of faith still plagues anglers since the first anglers succumbed to temptation by fishing in the Garden of Kelp and ate of the salmon there.

Since then, all anglers are born with a stain on their fishing souls called "The Scale of Original Snag."

I, too, have committed many angling sins, and have wandered the Desert of Skunk for years, lashing myself with old fishing line, sloshing around in leaky waders and scouring myself with glacier dust.

In the Book of Apocrafish, it is written that while Moses received one set of tablets for the nonfishermen, there was also a second set of commandments made specifically for anglers. According to the Guardian Angelfish, both sets of angling tablets were being delivered from on high when they were caught on a gust of wind called a Chinook. The tablets rode the wind before finally dropping into the Sea of All Knowledge, the Pacifish. The tablets eventually dissolved, and as a result, Pacific salmon were created. Newborn salmon instinctively know these commandments, which explain why salmon are one with the Pacifish, while anglers are not.

On one of my recent underwater diving pilgrimages in the Pacifish, I saw "The Current." The King suddenly appeared from the depths and he instructed me to recreate these commandments so that both man and salmon could co-exist in harmony.

Thus, I was ordained as the Ofishal Prophish in this. The Church of the Wayward Fisherman.

In today's sermon, I encourage you to heed my teachings on these commandments and turn not away

from The Current. It is the only way to avoid "The Deep Fish Fry" for all eternity.

1. I am the Alpha and the Omega. Thou Shalt Have No Other Fish Before Me

You deserve worms and malnutrition if you willfully eat a diet of farm-raised fish. Wild Alaska salmon is the seafood of life, and it is good for eye, heart and brain health with its Omega-3 fatty acids and Vitamin E alpha tocopherols.

2. Honor the Lowly Humpie and Dog, for They Shall Be Called Pink and Tiger

The lowly humpie and dog salmon are examples of how we should live life.

The King urged his fellow salmon to heed these words: "When evil anglers hate you, and exclude you and insult you and reject your name as unworthy of catching, fear not, for the enlightened angler will accept you as Pink and Tiger, both of which are sporting and edible."

Enlightenment is easy. Few people want to eat a pink salmon when it's called a humpback, or chum as a dog, when tiger or calico salmon sounds much tastier.

No matter your name in life, there will be a time to swim away from the school and be your own fish. Humpback salmon are the most numerous and smallest of the Pacific salmon, yet more than 50

percent of all salmon fry are killed or eaten before making it to salt-water. Of those, about two percent make it back to their natal spawning beds for the Salmon Rapture. The ones that return each year, however, are the best of the best. They persevered not because of size or name, but because each fish is as tough as nails, even though they migrate in schools most of their lives.

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Salmon is a vital aspect of Alaska life and deserves respect rather than viewed as an economic commodity to be plundered. A salmon takes the best of the ocean elements created from stardust billions of years ago, and repackages it as a life that nourishes our bodies and satiates our emotions.

The lesson here is to never give up, no matter what.

3. Thou Shalt Not Covet They Neighbor's Salmon Tackle

"For if we say we have no tackle, and we do, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Catching fish on a secret salmon lure known only to you, and lying to your fellow anglers about the lure you used for success, is an angling sin, but not as great as the angler who steals that lure for his own selfish gain. Both are punishable by being reincarnated as a crochet hook with no hope of ever again seeing a fish.

4. Thou Shalt Not Mooch

Alaskans eat salmon at least two to three times a week. While mooching for salmon will bring you great joy and a full freezer, mooching salmon from your neighbors is The Sin of Gluttony. Therefore, if your neighbor is without salmon, share thy bounty with him. Likewise, coveting your neighbor's salmon, when there is ample time to catch or buy your own, is the sin of The Entitlement Angler, who expects salmon for nothing and his lures for free. Catch your own fish, or buy it at the store. Don't mooch.

5. Thou Shalt Not Covet Hooking the Biggest Salmon, Lest Ye Be Caught

Jonah was a great angler who once had a desire to catch the big fish in the sea. Instead, because he didn't sharpen his hook properly, a huge fish ate him. After three days, the fish regurgitated Jonah because of his toughness of body and soul. The experience changed Jonah's heart about keeping big fish.

Consider releasing a trophy salmon because you can never truly own that which you hope to possess. Most anglers credit exceptional good luck as skill. But such a claim is The Evil Snagger's handiwork. Allow the Irish Lord of Humility to become the sin eater that will nibble away at such pride, and you'll soon be blessed with an abundance of tasty salmon fillets.

6. Thou Shalt Not Allow Salmon to Freezer Burn

The Book of Regulations may tempt you to commit the Sin of Gluttony, especially after you've legally stockpiled for yourself over 90 salmon for the year. Fall not into temptation. Keep the salmon you can realistically eat during the year. Release the rest. Keep only males. Tithe to the vacuum sealing or canning funds so your catch will be properly preserved and taste its best. Disregard this commandment and you'll be punished by eating fish that tastes like the Sawdust Bread Pudding that Aunt Hattie gave you 10 years ago, which is now part of the bottom layer of freezer-burn detritus.

7. Thou Shalt Love thy Salmon and its Habitat as Thyself

Salmon is a vital aspect of Alaska life and deserves respect rather than viewed as an economic commodity to be plundered. A salmon takes the best of the ocean elements created from stardust billions of years ago, and repackages it as a life that nourishes our bodies and satiates our emotions.

Yet in benefit there is often great sacrifice. Alaska salmon are born orphans and die childless. We will not anthropomorphize salmon. Neither will we grieve over their plight under darkened hoods nor praise the species with a celebratory potlatch. Each salmon should be honored as its own wonder of creation. Subsequently, anglers should honor all life, individually, as well as collectively. We may marvel at the dragonfly, ice worm and sculpin, but we tend to love that which physically and spiritually nourishes our bodies. If we would only love salmon as we love ourselves, we would ensure its survival for generations.

8. Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness Against Thy Salmon

Follow the path to salmon fishing salvation and success by being truthful. If you lose a salmon because of a badly tied knot or horsing the fish, you should tell your friends the truth. Don't speak falsehoods that you released the salmon because it had worms, was too red, or wasn't large enough to keep. Avoid this dark temptation of fish slandering debauchery.

9. Thou Shalt Praise the Salmon with All Thy Mind and Voice

King salmon can swim up to 60 miles a day for nearly 2,000 miles in the Yukon River, where upstream visibility is inches. During this journey, they subsist on body fat alone, eat no food and navigate by scent. Yet, all salmon provide an example of perseverance through adversity. Salmon snap our rods, burn out our drags, and snap our fishing lines, and they fight until they can fight no more. As a higher evolved species, can we do no less if we lose our jobs or encounter daily setbacks?

10. Thou Shalt Keep Holy The Salmon Sabbath

Take time each summer to put aside the rod and fillet knives, the vacuum-sealing chores and give thanks for Alaska's salmon bounty. Tell exciting salmon stories, where hoots and hollers are preferred over quiet vespers and contemplative prayer. Tithing isn't about jingly baskets of silvery coins and cash. The only offerings accepted here are silver-plated spoons, jeweled-colored flies and greenback Pixees.

Catching salmon for sport and for table is one of the greatest opportunities the Alaska outdoors offers us. Even in a natural death, the salmon gives life. Their decaying bodies provide nutrients for microorganisms and food for the rearing fry in what would otherwise be oligotrophic death streams and lakes that are void of nutrients. The salmon is truly, the Fish of Life.

I will now close with a simple meditation from The Book of Salmon.

"Give unto the Feds the things that are the Feds, but give to Alaskans the things that are Alaska."

Go and Fish, my Alaska friends, and be one with the salmon.

Chris Batin is the editor of The Alaska Angler, and author of numerous books and DVDs on Alaska fishing and the outdoors. For fishing tips and instructional videos, follow him online at Facebook.com/TheAlaskaAngler.