

Gluttony: A Lack Of Self-Control (Part Two)

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Enticing us whenever they can, restaurant dessert menus—replete with sumptuous photos of the entrees—carry such tempting statements as: "If there are seven deadly sins, then here are 8, 9 and 10!" and, "Give in to the Urge . . . SPLURGE!" And the names they give the desserts—"Death by Chocolate," "Praline Paradise," "Coconut Dream"—are enough to tempt even the strongest will.

It is easy to be gluttonous in an affluent society where everything is at our fingertips and where there is more than plenty of what the heart desires. To make matters worse, gastronomic temptations are conveniently and constantly shoved in our faces on a daily, if not hourly, basis. According to Dr. Kelly Brownell, director of the Center for Eating and Weight Disorders at Yale University, children see an average of 10,000 food advertisements a year, and most of those are for sweet cereals, fast food, candy and soft drinks. If we parents cannot resist, how will our children?

At gluttony's root is a lack of self-control, and our self-discipline is tested every time we see an advertisement for any product, especially food and drink. James 1:14 adds insightfully, "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." The responsibility for our actions is upon each of us individually. Verse 15 continues, "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." This is the process that leads to gluttony—and to death.

Gluttony adversely affects our character in all areas of self-control, exhausting us of perseverance for good and draining us of resistance to evil. Speaking from firsthand experience, Solomon warns, "When you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you; and put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food" (Proverbs 23:1-3). A person given to appetite has little or no willpower to resist his excessive cravings; he will do anything for the object of his excessive desire.

Every time we enter an all-you-can-eat cafeteria, we can be tempted. Eating and drinking more than is healthy for our bodies and minds reveals a lack of self-control. This lack of resistance is similar to someone who cannot leave a bottle of liquor alone. The inability to say, "No," comes from excessive desire that takes control of us. The shoe is on the wrong foot! Instead of being under self-control, we are being controlled!

This is directly contrary to what God desires. Notice what he tells the Israelites to do with the person who has lost control of his desires—even a child:

[His parents] shall say to the elders of his city, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard." Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil person from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear. (Deuteronomy 21:20-21)

God considers gluttony a character trait of an evil person, and so He tells us in Proverbs 23:20 to avoid those who eat and drink too much: "Do not mix with winebibbers, or with gluttonous eaters of meat." In this verse, meat represents food in general since meat partaken in a meal usually indicates a

substantially filling meal. Since associating with gluttons could entice us to eat too much, it is wise to avoid close associations with them, as with any willfully sinning person. Familiarity with sin rubs off on us and wears us down.

Too Much Distraction

Amazingly, many of the most avid idea- and opinion-pushers among us have the least understanding of God's purpose and plan for His church and the rest of humanity. They gluttonously devour theological information to feed their excessive desire for knowledge as religious hobbyists. This sin, like others, distracts us from truly important spiritual issues like overcoming and doing good. Solomon warns, "Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

Excessive attention to the minute details of theology produces imbalance, causing us to miss far more vital instruction—the proverbial "can't see the forest for the trees" syndrome. The Pharisees are a well-known example of this. Jesus castigates them for their skewed priorities in Matthew 23:23-24:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

The apostle Paul instructs that we stay away from anyone who tries to distract us from the weightier matters—the true purpose—of the law. "We command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (II Thessalonians 3:6). When others excessively emphasize theological technicalities of areas unrelated to our salvation, we should be very leery of their intentions.

Paul reminds us of the purpose of the commandment in I Timothy 1:5-7:

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere [non-hypocritical] faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

Studying a specific theological subject for months and years will make a person unbalanced, emotionally attached to the topic and deficient in the weightier matters of God's way of life. Such persons become gluttons for new ideas that feed heresy, and they justify their over-consumption by claiming that it is not their fault that they have access to so much religious information over the Internet and through the mail.

"Much study"—especially of a trivial subject or one unrelated to salvation—"is wearisome to the flesh," writes Solomon (Ecclesiastes 12:12). People of this inclination, the apostle Paul says, are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7). Just as with food, excessive study of the same subject day-in and day-out can cause a person to be unbalanced. We have to know when to say, "Enough!"

Not of Faith

Romans 14 generally concerns principles of Christian liberty. Verses 20-23 primarily refer to some believing eating meat is lawful while others, vegetarians, are offended by it. Paul instructs us how we should refrain from offending a brother over what we eat. Another principle in this context is applicable to gluttony:

Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. (verses 20-21)

If we are gluttonous and encourage or cause others who are weak to be gluttonous, part of the responsibility of their sin rests on us. This puts a great amount of pressure on us to be our brother's keeper, looking after his welfare without judging him. Paul continues:

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

If we doubt that we are eating as a Christian should, which includes both the quantity and the quality of the food, then it is not of faith. Therefore it is sin.

All Ten Commandments

Since gluttony is sin, which of the Ten Commandments does it break?

There are some who, in prayer and other acts of religion, are always in search of pleasure for their senses. They try to feel and taste God on a physical level, as if He were tangibly accessible to them in their acts of devotion. Their false faith comes from the enjoyment of seeing, touching, smelling, hearing or tasting their personally created god that comes in such forms as traditional liturgies, images, incense, music and sometimes food.

Paul writes in Philippians 3:18-19 that gluttons tend to concentrate on physical things, neglecting their spiritual relationship with God:

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.

We may think such idolatry is rare among us, but the apostle says there are "*many* . . . whose god is their belly," their appetites, their physical senses. They break the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," because their desire becomes a higher priority than their Creator and Sustainer. Gluttony breaks the rest of the commandments as well:

The second, when we serve or relinquish control to our physical desires. Colossians 3:5 says, "Therefore put to death your members which are on earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." We "bow down" to a false god when we gratify our lusts of the flesh and of the eyes (I John 2:16).

The third, when we fail to uphold God's name—and all that it represents—in glory and honor. Many call themselves Christians and claim to follow Christ, but lack the holy character God wants us to have (I Peter 2:5, 9). Is "Glutton" the name God wants His holy people to have? I Peter 1:15 answers, "He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."

The fourth, when we use the Sabbath, a feast day, to crave and overeat. Sometimes we do this under the assumption that, since we are fellowshiping, we can eat excessive amounts. Eating or drinking too much is seeking our own pleasure, which Isaiah 58:13-14 warns against in the context of the Sabbath:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD. . . .

The fifth, when we do not wisely use the many years of support and training we received from our parents. A child of any age who does not have self-control is a worry and an embarrassment to his parents. The glutton, abusing his body with excessive food, may not live even as long as his parents, fulfilling the inverse of the commandment's promise.

The sixth, by systematically and continually destroying the body and mind that God has given into our care. It is slow suicide. If parents are gluttons, they teach their children to do the same, thereby eventually killing them as well. "We are facing a real epidemic of obesity," said Dr. Jeffery Koplan, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "All segments of the population are getting fatter, but the highest increase is among the youngest ages. . . . There is no worse harbinger of what is to come." Since our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19), to destroy it knowingly is sin.

The seventh, when we over-eat, over-buy, over-accumulate as a "get" way of life. Our way of life is our religion, and if it is a lifestyle of excessive desire, our religion is in competition with God's way of life. This, in effect, is spiritual adultery, as seen in Jeremiah 3:6-10. God says in verse 9, "So it came to pass, through [Judah's] casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees." These idols, worshiped on the high places, became the object of Judah's excessive desire, just as food, drink or any material thing can be.

The eighth, when we take more than what is balanced and needful, thus more than God has given. In addition, by hoarding for ourselves we steal from others. Certainly, when there are people without enough, for us to consume more than we need is wrong (Proverbs 22:9; 11:24-26). A society that over-consumes at the expense of others is, at the very least, greedy. Wastefulness is a by-product of gluttony, and Americans no longer live by sayings like, "Waste not, want not!" We live in a careless, throw-away society, but the day will come when this gluttonous nation will lose everything and be taken into captivity. Proverbs 23:21 predicts, "For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty."

The ninth, when we are gluttonous while calling ourselves Christians. This is a lie and hypocritical, misrepresenting God. Commonly, gluttons blame a thyroid problem or claim it is a disease, thereby relinquishing responsibility. If this is not true, it is a lie. It is also a lie if we think that giving into excessive desire will not hurt us. God speaks of such self-deception in Jeremiah 7:8-10:

Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, "We are delivered to do all these abominations"?

The tenth, when we are not satisfied with what we have and desire the possessions of others. A glutton wants even more than he has. Children must be taught not to want the biggest piece of cake or the most ice cream. Solomon had one wife, then he wanted another and another and another until he had hundreds. Solomon was a glutton, which his power and wealth made easier.

As James says, if we break one commandment, we break them all (James 2:10). With gluttony, we can specifically break each one. It is not a trivial matter!

Jeshurun Grown Fat

Gluttony in anything leads to worse spiritual problems. The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 contains an indictment against Israel for her gluttony: "But Jeshurun [Israel] grew fat and kicked; you [individual Israelites] grew fat, you grew thick, you are covered with fat; then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of His salvation" (Deuteronomy 32:15). Jeshurun, meaning "the upright," is a poetical name for Israel carried over from her earlier uprightness, before she took for granted the physical and spiritual blessings that God provided. The metaphor Moses uses derives from a pampered animal that, instead of being tame and gentle, becomes mischievous and vicious as a result of good living and spoiled treatment. Israel did this in various acts of rebellion, murmuring, and idolatrous apostasy.

Spiritual Israel, the church of God, has the same gluttonous tendency today. The constant bombardment of new ideas to "clarify" and "improve" established doctrines seems enticing and titillating to the itching ear. Paul warns that this draws people into apostasy: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned to fables" (II Timothy 4:3-4).

Most of these "new ideas" are old issues recirculated every few decades to new and inexperienced "ears" in the church. Satan, the great deceiver, takes the old arguments, repackages them in modern guise and presents refurbished tasty morsels to the spiritual glutton who is weak in the faith. Paul admonishes, "Shun profane and vain babblings [empty chatter], for they will increase [lead] to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer" (II Timothy 2:16-17). Many times fanaticism, unbridled obsession, follows, and this, too, is a form of gluttony.

The Scriptures preserved for us through the ages make it clear that God anticipated the problem gluttony would be for the church, not just as a physical problem of excessive eating and drinking, but as a deeper sin of lust, greed, and lack of self-control. Paul instructs God's church to walk as Christians who set a good example of righteousness: "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:13-14).

Gluttony in food and drink, material possessions, or hobbies can be summarized easily with the simple phrases such as too much, too quickly, too eagerly, too soon, and too expensive. Gluttony is an excessive desire followed by inappropriate action.

Feasting is not the sin. It is good to feast in the right way. God obviously enjoys feasts: He gives His church six throughout the year. We must learn to use with balance and restraint the wonderful blessings God has given, setting good examples as Christians representing His way of life. In doing so, we will bring glory to Him!

Inset:

Ten Tips for Trimming Down

In researching his book, *The Fat of the Land: The Obesity Epidemic and How Overweight Americans Can Help Themselves*, Michael Fumento pored over thousands of articles in medical journals to find what works and what does not. His top 10 conclusions:

- 1.** Lose slowly. It improves your chance of not seeing weight come roaring back.
- 2.** Low-fat is NOT the answer. Nothing is making us fatter than the "low-fat/no-fat" fad. Many studies have shown that, for practical purposes, 1 calorie of fat is no worse than 1 calorie of protein or carbohydrate. Because we have been lulled into believing low-fat is better, we eat far more food than we otherwise would.
- 3.** Reduce sugar. Americans consume 150 pounds of sugar and corn sweeteners per person per year, 33 pounds more than 20 years ago.
- 4.** Pump fiber into your diet. It fills you up and speeds food through your body, cutting calorie consumption.
- 5.** Portion control is vital. Let appetite dictate consumption, not package sizes, restaurant portions or what others eat.
- 6.** Count calories. Do not obsess over each one, but eat only small portions of high-calorie foods.
- 7.** Cut out little things. Say you drink a 280-calorie bottle of juice five days a week. Drink water instead to cut 73,000 calories (18 pounds) a year.
- 8.** Exercise. There is a clear connection between regular vigorous exercise, losing weight and keeping it off.
- 9.** Turn off the TV. Watching fattens you, studies show.
- 10.** There is no weight-loss magic. It takes perseverance and hard work.

The desire to overcome this problem must be there first for any regimen to work.