

## Overcoming (Part 8): Self-Indulgence

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*Forerunner*, "Bible Study," March-April 2001

Today, we see an epidemic of obsession with everything from food and drink to personal agendas. In religion circles, some indulge themselves with new theological ideas that are nothing more than heresy. So much religious information is available on the Internet and in print that one so inclined can spiritually drown in false doctrine.

Solomon writes that too much study—especially of the wrong thing—is wearisome to the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Of this inclination to self-indulge in titillating religious knowledge, Paul says such people are, "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:6). Self-indulgence in anything leads to worse spiritual problems. This Bible study will investigate this common failure in Christian growth.

1. What does it mean to self-indulge? Proverbs 16:26; Ecclesiastes 6:7, 9; Matthew 23:25; Luke 11:39.

**Comment:** Jesus declares the Pharisees "hypocrites" because they looked like they led "clean" lives, but inside they were greedy and self-indulgent. A person indulges himself by taking unrestrained pleasure in his pursuit of enjoyment and showing undue favor to his desires and feelings. By excessive compliance in gratifying our own desires, we pamper, humor, and spoil ourselves. *Pamper* implies inordinate gratification of desire for luxury and comfort with a consequent enervating effect. *Humor* indicates yielding to moods or whims. *Spoil* stresses the injurious effects on a person's character. Self-indulgence is excessive satisfaction of our sensual appetites and desires for the specific purpose of pleasing the self.

2. What is the most common form of self-indulgence? Numbers 11:5-6, 32-34; Deuteronomy 21:20-21; Proverbs 23:1-3, 21; Philippians 3:18-19.

**Comment:** The power of appetite is a great enticement to self-indulge. In Deuteronomy 21:20, the Hebrew word for "glutton" is *zolel*, from a word meaning "to shake out" or "to squander." One who is extravagant, who wastes his means by self-indulgence, is a glutton. In Proverbs 23:21, the word means "debauchees" or "wasters of their own body."

3. What attitudes does self-indulgence promote? Isaiah 47:8-9; Luke 12:16-20; II Peter 2:13-14; II Timothy 3:1-6.

**Comment:** Among a few: fanaticism, false security, presumption, and fun-seeking are attitudes promoted by self-indulgence. Fanaticism is unbridled obsession, and though most do not recognize it as form of self-indulgence, it is a gratification of selfish desire. The apostle Paul says that we should avoid those who are driven by lust and greed and have no self-control.

4. What are the effects of a self-indulgent life? Proverbs 21:17; Luke 8:14; I Timothy 5:6; Titus 3:3; James 5:5.

**Comment:** Some of the results are poverty, spiritual emptiness, and death. In I Timothy 5:6 "live in pleasure" is translated from the Greek word *spatalao*, describing a lifestyle of abandonment to one's desires for comfort and pleasure. It appears again only in James 5:5, as "luxury" or "wanton" (KJV).

5. To what ultimate end does self-indulgence lead? Ecclesiastes 2:1-3, 10-11; Isaiah 22:12-13; 56:11-12; Amos 6:4-7; I Corinthians 15:32-34.

**Comment:** Self-indulgence leads to excessive striving for yet more worldly pleasure. For those whose chief aim in life is sensual pleasure, there is never enough to satisfy. Self-indulgence can lead to full-blown addiction. Without God's truth of the coming resurrections of mankind, men see no reason to refrain from a life of pleasure and dissipation, ending in death.

6. Is self-indulgence actually a spiritual sin? Deuteronomy 31:20-21; 32:15-18; II Timothy 2:16-18; 4:3-5.

**Comment:** The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 contains an indictment against Israel for her self-indulgence in the form of spiritual gluttony. The nation of Israel (Jeshurun) and individual Israelites grew fat and kicked, rejecting God. The metaphor used here is of a pampered animal, which instead of being tame and gentle, becomes mischievous and vicious as a result of good living and being spoiled. The Israelites showed their self-indulgence in craving and pursuing a pantheon of pagan gods and numerous false doctrines.

Some in the church of God today are similarly spiritually self-indulgent. The constant bombardment of enticing new ideas to "clarify" and "improve" established doctrines seems overwhelming and alluring to the itching ear. These "new ideas" are old traps circulated every few decades in the church. Satan, the great deceiver, takes the same temptations, repackages them in a new or slightly different form, and presents his refurbished tasty morsel to the spiritually weak, self-indulgent person. Despite these enticements, "the solid foundation of God stands" (II Timothy 2:19), and those who repent of sin and live the way of life Christ's name represents understand it.