

## The Taking Season

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I noted with great interest Cody Ford's sermonette two weeks ago encouraging us to, among other things, remember our year-round responsibility to remain separate from the world. And he added an appropriate seasonal emphasis about our response to the customs and manners of the world relating to the Christmas season. And since I was also planning to incorporate some further admonishments regarding the Yuletide season, I was thinking I would sort of refer to this as beware of the season part two. Then last week Hunter Swanson beat me to the punch with his discourse on the further dangers of our indirect and perhaps even unwitting acceptance of some of what we might too casually consider harmless, insignificant, or commonplace customs and traditions of this anti-God season. So here I am in week three to finish up what we might now call a beware of the season trilogy.

Now I can only conclude that since God has moved three of us in consecutive weeks to speak on this subject, that there exists some real danger that perhaps we are not as aware or mindful of as we should be. So though we are a couple of days beyond Christmas Day, we are still in the midst of this holiday season. And because of the Christmas gift giving tradition, many mainstream Christians like to refer to it as the giving season. And as much as Christmas season is supposed to inspire mankind's generosity, and many of man's most charitable efforts do culminate every December, underneath it all lies a seamy, sinister energy pushing all who are involved in the opposite direction.

You see, we know, brethren, that man's carnal nature, unrestrained, insists upon indulging the self. That we care more and take more for ourselves than we care for or give to others. In fact, I would call this holiday season with all its promotion of naked carnality, not the giving season, but the taking season. A season, I believe, for self-focus, self-concern, and the main topic for this sermonette, self-indulgence as individuals are compelled to measure their

self-worth as they open up their Christmas presents, estimating the money, time, and effort spent on them by others, or counting the number of Christmas cards received in the mail that you got on the refrigerator. Or the number of invitations to all the seasonal parties and to judging and measuring others' worth while they budget for what they are going to spend and on whom they will spend it.

I can remember back in my pre-conversion years working so hard to buy the coolest gifts, the most unique gifts, and I did so strategically, not simply because I cared so deeply for those I was buying for, and I cared for most of them. But because I wanted to be seen as both generous and cool, seeking, or you could say, trying to purchase everyone's attention and approval while gift wrapping my secret self-indulgent ways in the sheep's clothing of the so-called giving season.

Now I want to drill down a little further on the idea of self-indulgence. To define it the *American Heritage Dictionary* says, 1) excessive indulgence of one's own appetite and desires. 2) indulgence of one's appetites, desires, or inclinations, the opposite of self-restraint and self-denial, at least usually. And 3) excessive or immoderate indulgence of one's own personal desires and needs above all others. And I was particularly drawn to the definition I found on Biblehub.com: A love of pleasure divorced from righteousness.

Let us take a look though at how the Bible defines it. Let us turn to start to James chapter 5. We will read verse 5 and I am reading this from the ESV.

**James 5:5** (ESV) You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter [or as other translations say, for the day of slaughter].

Now the Greek word used here for self-indulgence is *Strong's* #5171, *truphaó*, to revel or indulge in luxury for pleasure. And this definition is the one that we are typically most familiar with when we think of self-indulgence, but we will soon see that there is more to it than the excessive pursuit of luxury and fun.

Let us turn to Luke chapter 7, verse 25. Our Savior is speaking to the multitudes regarding John the Baptist.

**Luke 7:25** "But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts."

And so the word used here for luxury is *Strong's* #5172 *truphé*, to break up or enfeeble, especially the mind and body by indulgence, effeminacy, luxury, or debauchery. Keep in mind the word effeminacy as we go forward, which means the quality of being effeminate, derogatory of a man. It will be more significant later on.

And finally, let us turn over to II Peter chapter 2, verses 12 and 13.

**II Peter 2:12-13** But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you.

Now Peter in his warning about false prophets and teachers uses *truphé*, #5172, which we just defined for the word carouse, but carousing is a different word. It is *Strong's* #1792 *entruphaó*, which continues the theme, meaning to engage in self-indulgence which results in the breakdown of a person's body, soul, and spirit. Now this definition is similar to the last one where the enfeebling or weakening of the mind, body, and soul come into play. So I think we can see here that self-indulgence to the extent referred to in these scriptures is potentially very dangerous and not to be trifled with.

But let us be certain. This does not mean that we cannot enjoy our lives by occasionally treating ourselves to something luxurious or explicitly pleasurable, particularly if we can afford it. God even encourages us to enjoy food and beverage and whatever our souls delight in while at the Feast. Where the problem exists as usual is in our hearts when we lose our balance and become obsessed with the gratification of our desires to the detriment of our relationships with each other, our fellowship, our community, and especially with God, as Paul wrote to Timothy warning him of those who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. And keep in mind one other

important point, our self-indulgent desires do not always have to be for typical pleasure or luxuries.

The ascetics who believed in denying physical gratification were just as self-indulgent, I believe, in their pursuit of their unbalanced and extremist beliefs which typically separated them from community and God. They were obsessed with extreme austerity. Yes, self-denial, what most would identify as the opposite of self-indulgence until it became self-indulgent in itself.

Now getting back to the idea of the taking season, let us quickly look at some biblical characters who displayed self-indulgent ways and had something taken that was important from them.

An obvious first choice, of course, is Satan. His rebellion against God was rooted entirely in his unbridled and runaway self-indulgence. His lust for power and praise overwhelmed him, and now he is doomed to lose everything. His power, his beauty, his talent, his closeness to the Creator, and moreover, his eternal life have all essentially been taken from him.

What of Samson? His insistence for satisfying his self-indulgent desires for Philistine women became his downfall, as he eventually had his strength, his eyesight, his dignity, and any spiritual credibility he might have had taken from him, eventually causing him to have his very life taken upon his final act.

And then how about Solomon? No mortal man was ever blessed as he was with more power, riches, acclaim, and wisdom than any who ever lived. And sadly his self-indulgence knew no bounds. His own words from Ecclesiastes 2, "Whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure." And while we cannot be sure that he did not lose his chance at eternal life, I for one do believe he repented in time. We do know that his joy, his love for life, for labor, for wisdom was taken from him and replaced with so much despair and sorrow and regret. But perhaps his most moving words regarding his indulgent ways should forever ring in our ears: All is vanity and a grasping for the wind.

Now remember our biblical definitions earlier that mentioned the enfeebling of the mind, body, and soul, along with the effeminacy of self-indulgence.

Well, consider this. Now we have all heard about the war on Christmas echoing in the halls and sanctuaries of mainstream Christianity as well as from the news reported on the more conservative networks and websites. And while many still cry over the secular movement to remove Christ from Christmas, to outlaw all notions of traditional religiosity from the public sphere, there is an even greater threat to keeping Christ *in* Christmas today, and that comes from the good old LGBTQ movements rapidly expanding around the world. Here are a few paragraphs from a recent news story.

Once again this Christmas season, a growing number of progressive churches appear determined to remake the incarnation in their own image, trading reverence for relevance and theology for applause. In Fort Collins, Colorado, Foothills Church hosted its 3rd annual, A Drag Christmas Spectacular, a 90 minute production where drag artists would, in the church's own words, slay their way to Bethlehem, reframing the nativity as a celebration of queer joy, chosen family, and radical self-acceptance. These are not isolated experiments. In recent weeks, other progressive congregations have advertised drag-themed Advent services and queer nativity retellings in Seattle, Washington. A spiritual community connected to the Evangelical Lutheran Church presented Drag Church, The Yassification of Ebenezer Scrooge.

Now the term yassification is one I had to look up. It is a popular slang term in LGBTQ circles and is essentially defined as expressing great pleasure or excitement in feminizing men, including the act of digitally enhancing a male's photo to make him appear feminine, as in all drag performers. How telling that this yassification matches perfectly with the enfeebling of the mind, body, and soul, along with the effeminacy of self-indulgence. And if we are not careful, we could easily find ourselves taking sides with mainstream Christmas-keeping Christians against "the crazy lunatics who try to hijack the season from its original intended purpose." See, brethren, regardless of our emotional sympathies, this is an argument, a sentimental trap that we must steer clear of.

One side made up of the blind, deceived, and unwise but well-meaning nominal Christians, naively but sincerely promoting Christmas and all its self-indulgent traditions versus the sad, depraved, and radical extremists who

originated from these traditions but morphed into perhaps the world's most unrestrained, hedonistic, and nakedly self-indulgent movements where in growing numbers they believe anything goes. Both are satanically inspired and both growing more angry, more offended, more exasperated, and more miserable every day. How remarkably sad for them all.

Now I have one final contention before I wrap up this treatise.

Since we are told that this Yuletide season is supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year, as the iconic Christmas carol insists, why is it that in the week following Christmas, as everyone prepares to enter the new year, suicide rates spike an average of 33 percent? The biggest such increase all year, and it has been a problem like this for decades. See, I am guessing a lot of people do not believe they measure up. They cannot find their happy place in the midst of all the laughter, jubilation, and joy displayed or reflected in all of the TV ads and shows, movies, and carols, and twinkling lights. So instead of a season of giving, it became a season of taking—their own lives, that is, and how unspeakably tragic.

And while I do not want to accuse every suicide victim for being self-indulgent, it is not debatable that they were dreadfully unhappy and disturbingly depressed. And it was novelist Tom Robbins, known for his optimism and upbeat outlook on humanity, who wrote, "Unhappiness is the ultimate form of self-indulgence. When you're unhappy, you get to pay a lot of attention to yourself. You get to take yourself, oh, so seriously." A lot to unpack there and another loathsome victory for our adversary.

Now heading towards a final conclusion, I believe we all recognize and believe and support our teachings of the evils of Christmas. Nothing new there. That is not something that we want to take part in. But as God's elect, do we despise it enough? Do we stop and ponder all of its overt and covert dangers to our spiritual journey, as Cody intimated a couple of weeks ago? Do we stop and consider how much of an abomination to God all its sights, sounds, tastes, and smells really are, or do we let a few things slide, as Hunter asked? Again, it is important that we recognize that enjoying life and occasionally indulging in luxury or a giant piece of chocolate is absolutely fine, assuming that we keep a sort of leash on the desire.

And you know, just because a dog has a leash does not mean it can never run. It really comes down to a matter of balance, safety, and control, and seeing to it that our relationship with God is never challenged.

Now with what we have discussed today, we see mankind spinning wildly out of balance and hurtling rapidly towards the enfeebling and destruction of mind, body, and soul for all those who participate in its sins. And while the Christmas season is hardly the only time that we need to pay attention to controlling our desires and understanding their origins, it does seem readily apparent that Satan intended this time of year to promote extreme nonstop self-indulgence, the best of the worst that mankind can imagine, think, see, experience, and do. And it is all wrapped up in shiny red paper and a giant silver bow.

He essentially installs every captivating light, erects and decorates every alluring evergreen, composes and sings all the charming and enchanting carols, and bakes all the cookies and treats waiting by the fireplace for Santa's arrival. It is such a splendid picture of an annual tragedy framed in the false notions of charity, of hope, and of love. The season of giving.

But when we look deeper and pull back the covers, we expose the diabolical and ceaseless effort that Satan is making to steal our crown during this season of taking. Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ for calling us out of this mess, and let us not allow ourselves to become ensnared in any of Satan's exquisite but deadly traps.

To conclude, let me read from the ESV the following five verses. No need to turn there, please just listen.

**Ecclesiastes 2:24** (ESV) There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil, this also I saw is from the hand of God.

**I Timothy 5:6** (ESV) But she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

**Colossians 3:2** (ESV) Therefore, set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

**Philippians 2:3** (ESV) And let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

**Revelation 3:11** (ESV) And behold, I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no 1 may take your crown.