

## **Sinning Like A Christian: #7**

### **Gluttony: Feeding Your Face and Starving Your Heart**

**January 17, 2010**

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

**Frederick Buechner** writes this, *A glutton is one who raids the icebox for a cure for spiritual malnutrition.*

It is not uncommon to be in line either at Tops or Wal-Mart and see a magazine article that reads, *Trim your Tummy: 10 Ways to Curb Your Cravings*. And then on the same magazine cover there will be another article that reads, *Irresistible Chocolate Desserts*. If combating gluttony requires curbing our cravings for the irresistible we are doomed from the start.

The Church has put so much emphasis on lust, but speak very little on gluttony. One can make the case that gluttony is far worse than lust. *We flatter ourselves in thinking that we are a sex-obsessed culture. Food is really our cultural downfall and obsession.* - William Williamson. Historically, gluttony was not a particularly terrible sin. Economically, eating habits of everyday people.

But today, that has changed completely. In our day we have no such misgivings about the goodness of pleasure and our right to enjoy whatever we please. What we want in this society is pleasure that does not unduly harm us. We hear a lot about safe sex.

But there are these other subtle messages, *Sensible drinking. Low-fat devil's food cookies. Enjoy the full taste with zero calories.* Manufactures are doing everything possible for us to get the maximum pleasure with little consequences. Things like nutrasweet, chewing gum, and Olestra- a fat-substitute in products like potato chips, allows us to consume as much as we want, limited only by the amount of pleasure we crave.

**Rebecca Deyoung:** *We are eating things without calories, chewing things not meant to be swallowed, and consuming foods that cannot be digested, so we can have the unrestricted pleasures of eating while carefully bracketing their real nature and function of food itself.*

Our society tells us that instant gratification is good. Consciously or unconsciously, we pursue cheap thrills. How does that relate to gluttony?

**William Raspberry** gave a lecture entitled. *The most detrimental point in human history.* What was the worst invention, that which led to the downfall of the human race? Raspberry said it was when humanity learned to refine sugar!

Earlier, when humanity wanted to satisfy its cravings for sweetness, it had to wait until it found some honey or until fruit ripened. Now, with refined sugar, we can have sweetness fix anytime we want. We are quick to jump on those who abuse alcohol or drug addiction, but who can go for a day without any refined sugar?

Rebecca DeYoung writes, *If there's anything simply about gluttony, it is its focus on pleasure. One's own pleasure. Excessive pleasure. Immediate, tangible pleaser.*

She goes on to say, *Gluttony is really not about how much we're eating, but about how our eating reflects how much pleasure we take in eating food.*

Gluttony, it is not just the excessiveness of food that is the sin, it is also the **excessive attentiveness to food**. Gluttony is not merely wolfing down large quantities of food, Gluttony is being overly concerned about food and being fixated on food.

Without a doubt, eating is a pleasurable thing. God designed it that way.

### **Think of the number of meals that are mentioned in Scripture.**

Jesus spoke so much about meals and parties, banquets, and feasts in so many stories regarding the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was big on parties. It is still somewhat of a scandal that Jesus' first followers were criticized for having too much fun in food and drink.

When the image of God inside of us got twisted and marred because of sin, we want to take the pleasures of food and push it to the extreme. It's not just food but other areas in our lives like sex.

When we push pleasures to the extreme it violates God's holiness. Waters of a river banks overflowing its banks. Pleasure out of control is destructive.

God created the pleasures of life as a good thing. There are healthy boundaries that we are commanded to stay in. When we cross those boundaries and begin to push pleasure to the extreme, we have now open ourselves to a bottomless abyss. You will never satisfy it. **Tiger Wood's sexual** endeavors.

Excessive pleasure, out of control pleasure, brings internal chaos to a person's life and can eventually, if not bridled, bring destruction. Let me make the point one more time, gluttony is not necessarily how much you are eating, gluttony is being fixated on food to give me immediate pleasure or stress relieve, filling some internal void. One can be overweight and not be gluttonous. One can be skinning and be fixated on food.

In 5th Medieval condemnations against Gluttony, the two texts that were recited were:

**\* Romans 16:17 & 18**

*17. I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.*

**\* Philippians 3:18-19**

*18. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.*

This is a shaky scriptural support against gluttony. The fact is there really is no direct reference against gluttony in Scripture. It is an odd sin. In her book, gluttony, **Prancine Prose** asks, *Who in the world decided that gluttony was a sin? ...whom exactly does it harm except the glutton himself?*

**William Williamon** writes, *Gluttony is a low, guttural, unimaginative, swine-like sin.*

Why is it then, did gluttony appeared on the list. In a nutshell, gluttony epitomizes the sins of the flesh.

When those desert monastics were complying these list of sins, probably the one main desire that tortured them the most was a desire for a good meal. Chrysostom claimed that it was gluttony that turned Adam out of Paradise.

In the Middle Ages, gluttony had its own little commercial ditty:

- \* *Too daintily,*
- \* *too sumptuously,*
- \* *too hastily,*
- \* *too greedily,*
- \* *too much.*

### **Daintily**

In the book, **Screwtape Letters**, C.S. Lewis writes about how one devil is bragging to another that they have hoodwinked the human race into thinking that gluttony is no longer of moral concern because everyone knows that eating too much is wrong. But the devils have merely switched strategies, now cleverly tempting us into "*The gluttony of delicacy*" instead of "*the gluttony of excess.*"

The devil goes onto describe a woman who says things like,

- \* *Oh, I don't like that toasted.*
- \* *Could I get the pasta dish, but without the sauce and without the mushrooms and with the spinach instead.*
- \* *No, no, I never eat such-and-such.*

Are you one of those who regularly sends the plate back to the kitchen...twice? Picky eater?

The key to daintily gluttonous is that they arrive at the table focused on their expectation of getting a certain pleasure and with an equally focused determination to do whatever it takes to get it.

They may use good manners and eat moderate amounts, but the desire behind it all is the drive to get pleasure for themselves.

**\* Sumptuously**

It is similar to the picky eater's problem in its preoccupation with what is eaten. They excessively seek the pleasures of "*satiety and fullness*," so they eat foods that promise this feelings. Selecting the foods that offer maximal satisfaction. Selecting foods that are heavy on the beef, butter and cream sauces at the expense of avoiding other nutritional foods. They focus on foods that taste rich and are filling. Foods that have no nutritional value. High in fat & sugar.

**\* Hastily.**

We have all heard the phrase, that person is just shoveling it in. Hasty eater is a person who is putting another bite in their mouth before that last one is chewed. They can't wait for the food to be put on the table and they are picking at it before the blessing.

Whenever I did that as **a teenager, my dad** would reach to stab my hand with a fork while my mom is trying to put supper on the table.

**\* Greedily**

The greedy eater often eats quickly to make sure he gets enough of the pleasurable dish he wants, before anyone else can elbow in and get to it before him. His greatest fear is the disappointment of going back for more and finding that someone else beat him to the last Buffalo wing. The greedy eater will tend to want to pile his plate high on the first trip to the buffet, taking two helpings right away to prevent the disappointment of returning later and finding nothing left.

**\* Too Much**

Eat past the point of fullness for the sake of indulging their tastes. They know that they will feel sick and bloated later, but they take another helping, savoring every mouthful.

*I know that I'm full, but I can't resist just one more.*

*Wow, I'm stuffed, but that cheesecake is too wonderful to turn down.*

**Rebecca DeYoung** puts in a nutshell by saying, *The question is not whether we are fat or thin, polite or impolite, but whether we are eating to satisfy our own wants, in a way that elevates our own satisfaction above other good things.*

**PowerPoint: Picture of a spoiled baby.**

Our stomach is a spoiled child. When it doesn't get what it wants it throws a temper tantrums.

1. One thing we need to keep in mind is that bodily cravings never have anything but temporary satisfaction. No matter how lovely the pleasure we take in (eating in this case), we will always get hungry again. The appetite is never satisfied.

2. We are more than just material beings. Satisfying our desire for the pleasure of eating doesn't "fill up" the whole person. Our spiritual desires are left empty. If we leave the spiritual desires unfilled long enough, we will lose sight of them and become overly preoccupied in filling that huge void by indulging ourselves physically. One being food.

3. Gluttony leads to other sins.

Remember that story of Noah after the flood. He drank too much and I'm sure ate too much to the point that he failed to notice that he was sleeping with his own daughters.

**Thomas of Kempis**, in Imitation of Christ, says, *When the belly is full to bursting with food and drink, debauchery knocks at the door.*

## How did I do personally?

- \* *Too daintily,*
- \* *too sumptuously,*
- \* *too hastily,*
- \* *too greedily,*
- \* *too much.*

### Personal evaluation:

#### 1. Too Daintily.

Picky eater. I don't venture out as much as I should in trying new foods. When something is served to me, and it doesn't look like what I'm used to, I find myself snubbing it. Burger King, *Have it your way.*

#### 2. Too sumptuously:

Do I seek foods that offer me "*satiety and fullness*, If one was to look at my diet, one would say, it is way to heavy on the meats, and foods that have a high fat content. Amount of meat that you are to eat should be no bigger than your fist. I'm am picking foods that are rich in taste not so much regarding their nutritional value.

#### 3. Too Hastily.

There are times in my daily routine, that I should be eating and I don't, Times when I shouldn't be eating.

- \* Breakfast
- \* Lunch

Eating slows me down.

#### 4. Too Greedily

Potluck. Scan the table to see what is out there and to make sure you get your fair share of it. One extra meatball.

#### 5. Too Much

Eat past the point of fullness for the sake of indulging their tastes

### What do we Do?

**Augustine** offers some practical advice on avoiding gluttony. He says that what or how much food we eat makes no difference whatsoever when it comes to virtue, as long as we are eating in a way that is appropriate to our health, the people we live with, and our vocation.

We should eat in a way that is becoming and befitting to all that God has called us to be and do. We are not to become so overly attached to the pleasure of eating that we complain about the food, over indulge, or zero in on foods that only give pleasure.

The question is are we eating in a way that contributes to or at least maintains our overall health and well-being, spiritually, emotionally and physically? The fact is, our sensory desires have trumped our good judgement in what is good for us and what is not.

**Eating is a social act.** We are not just animals. Food has a social and symbolic value as well.

**Rebecca DeYoung** makes a great point in saying that food is an expression of love for another person. It provides provision, comfort, security and celebration.

She writes, *Life's most important moments are marked with foods - from a nursing mother's bond with her child, to a wedding cake, to the hospitality of a warm supper brought after a funeral. Eating nourishes us not just physically, but also emotionally and spiritually.*

Food is an important aspect of community.

Family, or church life.

Mother who cooks everyday, it's done as an expression of love.

When a person brings a dish to serve at a potluck, it's an expression of love.

When I go to a pot luck and there isn't anything there that I like, or lack of it, is like snubbing your nose to God. You are missing the point. The church potluck is a venue to create community, a way to share love, and to celebrate a taste of something that someone worked hard at making. It is not a smorgasbord to stuff yourself.

### **Gluttony's Remedy: Fasting.**

We often think of as a 40 days fast. We can do a simple fast, with no meats, or 8 hour fast

It is amazing how attached we are to certain foods and we don't realize until it's taken away.

Refine sugar. I don't eat that much sugar. It's surprising that my body craves for sugar.

It's like I need a constant drip 24/7.

I justify it in my mind that I only eat only 3 M&M's out of the bowl. But it's a constant drip of sugar in my system. How attached are we to certain foods? More than we realize.

**Richard Foster** remarks, *Fasting reveals the things that control us.*

**Rebecca DeYoung**, *Fasting as a spiritual discipline, accomplishes at least two things. By giving up certain foods for a time, and by not eating to satiety, we learn anew to appreciate and to be content with simple foods.*

Who will appreciate a simple piece of cheese more - one who eats several Big Macs every day, or one who has just undergone a Lenten fast, abstaining from dairy products for several weeks.

Fasting heightens the spiritual senses and dulls the physical desires. As one spiritual writer says, *While involving self-denial, fasting does not seek to do violence to the body but rather to restore it to health and equilibrium.*

The primary aim of fasting is to make us conscious of our dependence on God. If we always take our fill of food and drink, we easily grow confident in our own abilities acquiring a false scenes of autonomy and self-sufficiency.

The purpose of Lenten fast of abstinence from food or certain food is to point us towards our inward brokenness and contrition. It is to bring us to the point where we appreciate the full force of Christ's statement, *Without Me you can do nothing.* Jn. 15:5

Gluttony seeks pleasure in food with the intent of avoiding certain feelings of discomfort inside of us.

- \* Try to fill some void or emptiness that only God can fill.
- \* Seek pleasure out of the boundaries that God intended for us to live.

**Frederick Buechner**, *A glutton is one who raids the icebox for a cure for spiritual malnutrition.*

**The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:**

### **Resources:**

DeYoung, Rebecca: *Glittering Vices*

William Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*