

“7--Gluttony”

A pastors' conference was being held in a hotel and at the same time there was a bar-tenders' conference going on in the same hotel. The two groups had basically the same menu at one of their evening meals except the dessert. The chef fixed pie for the pastors but spiked watermelon for the bar tenders. The combination of the two groups was a bit more than the small hotel could handle and the servers got in a hurry and accidentally took the spiked watermelon to the pastors and the pie to the bar-tenders. When the chef realized the mistake he ordered the servers to bring the watermelon back. They came back and told him it was too late, the preachers were eating the watermelon.

The chef said, "Well, do they like it?"

One server spoke up and said, "Like it! They're all coming back for seconds and thirds, and putting the seeds in their pockets!"

Today we are going to talk about gluttony and gluttony is about an excess in anything. Gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins and the reason we're talking about this is not to make you feel bad, or me feel bad. We're talking about sin because if we can name the things that tempt us, then we can begin to have power over them. If we're aware of what can happen, then we more likely to avoid falling into traps. God's desire clearly in scripture is for us to have joy, to have life, and have it to the full. Sin makes life miserable. That's why God's given us direction about it.

We sin when we choose a path different from the one God wants us to take. We sin when we miss the mark, when we don't even aim for the goals God has in mind for us. We sin by giving in to temptation, through lack of discipline, through exhaustion, through rebellion. There are lots of reasons why we end up falling into sin. And when we do, we start to feel miserable. Of course there is enough thrill in sinning to keep us coming back again and again, but every time do, we are worn down a little more, we distance ourselves from God a little more, we push away from others, we are robbed of a little more joy each time. Before long we are lonely, miserable, hurting and lost. Sin can destroy. It can even be deadly.

Today we are talking about gluttony. We don't really want to talk about this because it hits close to home. Mostly because we assume that gluttony is all about over-eating and being overweight. But gluttony is not just about food and being overweight. Gluttony has little to do with your weight or waistline. **Gluttony is the sin of taking natural pleasures to excessive extremes.** To obsess on something that gives pleasure. And when we do that with food, yes, it tends to affect our weight and our waistlines. That's the form of gluttony that shows on most of us, but some people can be gluttonous with food and never gain an ounce because of their metabolism—the rest of us really hate those people! But it isn't just about that.

But that food and drink comes to mind when we think of gluttony is a symptom of our culture. Our all-you-can-eat buffet culture. In our culture, we're never far from food. It's accessible to us, it is relatively inexpensive, it's pleasurable to us, and we indulge.

But think about the tension we live in. On the one hand we are bombarded with encouragement to eat, eat, eat! But on the other hand we are also bombarded with images of skin and bones, lean and sexy models and actors. We are encouraged to think that that's what we could look like if only we tried a little harder, ate a little (or a lot) less, did Zoomba, or ran, or bought a Bowflex machine. We get mixed messages all day long. Eat, eat, eat...it will make you feel good! And get thin, thin, thin...that will make you feel good! What this kind of tension creates is a culture of shame, and obsession. When we obsess about food we've made it our god. That's idolatry.

Ninety-five percent of us are already ashamed of how we eat and how we look in comparison to the images we see on TV and in the movies. So I am not going to shame you. In fact what I want to tell you is to stop obsessing about what your body looks like! And stop obsessing about what other people's bodies look like!

I say that, but I've also got to tell you that I've had a hang up about food and body image for a very long time and I know what it's like to be obsessive about it. I was a wrestler growing up. I started wrestling when I

was five years old and became very good at it. I wrestled all through grade school and when I was in Jr. High I practiced with the High School Team. That's where I learned how to cut weight, diet, and worse. In high school as a freshman I wrestled in the 98 pound weight class. I had to watch every ounce I ate and drank. My life began to revolve around what I could eat or not eat and when I could eat it. I learned how to eat to the point of being full and then throw it back up. I learned about peer pressure and performance pressure.

Christmas break that year was a disaster—a chance to go off the diet. I went off the diet and gained 10 pounds. My body was so hungry that it used every bit of that food to build bone and muscle. I could never get back down. I was in a growth spurt and the next year I wrestled in the 112 pound weight class. I had to do the same thing all over again. My body wanted to grow so bad and I was starving it. If I wasn't wrestling or running I was sleeping. I slept every chance I got. I slept in class. I was zombie. But when I had the chance to eat, if we were on break, I gorged myself. Food became a thing I loved and a thing I feared the most. I remember thinking that I was caught in a kind of nightmare that I couldn't get away from. I pictured myself doing that all through High School and then on into college and beyond. I remember fearing my future. Being obsessed with food and weight the rest of my life.

In the midst of all that I had a head injury during wrestling practice (I know that you're thinking that explains a lot!) Being undernourished played a part in that. It ended my wrestling career, and I was so thankful it did.

The reason I'm telling you this is to let you know that I know what it's like to obsess about food, and body image, and weight, and being fat. Binging and purging. It's ancient history for me, but at the same time, there's a vestige of it still there. Gluttony is a very real issue for me. And Jesus words ring in my ears, **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?...But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:25, 33).**

Before we go deeper here, I need to clarify this. The ancients said that there's a difference between the venial sin of gluttony and the deadly sin of gluttony. Venial means minor. A venial sin was simply something that became a small impediment in your walk of faith. Something that clouded your relationship with God a little bit, kept it from being as good as it could be. But the deadly sin of gluttony is when consumption becomes your god—when eating and drinking (consuming) become an obsession that pushes God away and breaks our relationship with other people and turns us into something we are not intended to be. That's what we want to talk about today.

The word gluttony comes from the Latin word **Gluttire means to gulp down**. The picture is gulping down food so that you don't even taste it or enjoy it. It means to over-consume food, or drink or intoxicants. Gluttony is consuming more than you need. More than it takes to satisfy you. More than your fair share. Gluttony is consuming to the point that it hurts you or takes resources from someone else.

And it's anything we consume in excess, and anything we obsess about even though we might not actually, physically consume it. We think about what we're going to eat all the time, or what we're going to drink, or the next things we're going to buy. It becomes our obsession thinking about what we're going to consume. That's gluttony. And it's our national pastime. The rest of the world looks at us as gluttons. Our gluttony is major economic engine for the world, and our gluttony consumes most of the world's resources.

We're meant to enjoy food and to have an appetite for food, but when that appetite takes over, we're heading down the path of this deadly sin. It's no longer about enjoying the pleasure that God intended food to have, we obsess and we over indulge and what started as pleasure because pain, it harms us and it can harm others too.

Part of what feeds this problem is that there is a part of us that can think that more is always better. When I was growing up, we had pop once every few weeks. And a lot of the time it was an 8oz pop shop pop. A large drink then was 16oz. Today, a small drink is 16oz. A child size is 12oz. You can get a 54oz drink at most convenience stores. It's the best value! Supersizing those fries at McDonalds is the best value. Did you know that large order of fries is almost 3 times the size of an order of fries in 1970 at about 200 calories in it. A

large fries today has almost 600 calories in it. I'm not bashing McDonalds, I eat there occasionally and I like it. My point is that restaurants used to control portions for us, but many don't anymore, and instead of us practicing self control, we buy the best bargain, get the most calories, and consume them all without really thinking about it. We bought into the philosophy that more was always better, and that our lives are about having more. That became our life purpose.

So if you can have a car with 200 horsepower, isn't 400 hp better? If a 3,000 sq ft house is good, isn't 4,500 sq ft better? More is better and what we live for is more. Believing that life consists in the abundance of our possessions, that life consists in consumption, that's gluttony especially in a world where so many have so little. Paul wrote, **"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength"** (Philippians 4:11-13).

I've learned that there are three forms of gluttony, and they are rarely talked about. The first form of **Gluttony is wanting more pleasure from something than it was made for.** Let me explain. The world is full of good things that God has put here for our pleasure (1 Tim 4:4-10). Everything from the beauty of sunset, to food, to sex, to friendship. We are to enjoy these things in their proper context, but when we focus on one of them to the exclusion of everything else we fall into the sin of gluttony. It's very possible to get so caught up in something pleasurable: watching sports, reading, food, friends, boating, travel or shopping, we get so caught up in it that we are no longer capable of enjoying other things.

I remember reading about an experiment on rats done a long time ago. Researchers hooked electrodes to the rat's brains so that every time they pressed a button in their cage they received a jolt of intense pleasure. What they found was that the rats obsessed on that pleasure so much that they starved to death pushing the button. They would not sleep, even though they could if they wanted to. They didn't eat, even though food was right there in their cage. We can obsess in similar ways, getting caught up in the pleasures of life so much that we end up not really living life at all.

We commit the sin of gluttony when we demand more pleasure from something than it was made for. Normally we can only eat so much food, but some people in Ancient Rome wanted more pleasure so they induced themselves to vomit after the meal so they could eat more.

The second form of gluttony is wanting things exactly our way. Wanting things exactly our way includes complaining about unimportant defects in products, the temperature in a room, the color of a laundry basket, the way a bed is made or toilet is cleaned.

We have to expect a certain amount of discomfort in life, but if we have the sin of gluttony we want to avoid discomfort at all costs. Instead of letting the minor inconveniences in life make us stronger, when we are gluttons, we insist on being pampered.

The third form of gluttony is demanding too much from people. There is a healthy, natural amount of time to spend with friends and acquaintances, but if gluttony gets hold of us, we just can't get enough. When we do this we expect so much of a person that we make incredible demands until the person pushes away from us or explodes in anger. If we have gluttony in us and this happens we are wounded and shocked and surprised that someone would take offense at our love for them.

You see this kind of gluttony when a parent demands too much from their child. They get pleasure from their child's time and accomplishments and push the kid beyond what a child should be pushed. They demand more from a child than should be demanded. Parents should derive pleasure from their children, but to push them to accomplish, to demand all of their time is a form of gluttony.

In some dating relationships, one person wants to be with the other one constantly, to the point that the other one can barely hold down a job or continue in school. The object of this affection is expected to be a source of pleasure more of the time than is reasonable. This is the sin of gluttony. It's a destroyer of focus, of relationships, of true joy.

If gluttony is a poison then the antidote is in the virtues of **Self-discipline and moderation**. We're told in the Bible that God has made self-discipline available to us through the power of his spirit. We need that power! You see, on our own we can't eat just one chip! Just one cookie! On our own we can't overcome wanting things our way or no way at all. On our own we can't know when to say when and give the people we love the space that they need. But God's spirit in us can. It sounds so simple doesn't it?! Let God's spirit in and let it bring with it the self-discipline we need to overcome gluttony. But letting God's spirit in is difficult for us to do because it takes surrender. It means getting honest with God about the stuff you cling to, the stuff that you think you need and can't live without, and letting God be in charge of that stuff.

If gluttony is an issue for you then surrender to God will allow God into your life and he will bring the self-discipline you need. It's interesting that the self-discipline we need doesn't come from ourselves! It comes from God!

The other virtue that overcomes gluttony is called moderation. Moderation helps keep gluttony outside the door of your heart. Moderation is preventive medicine. Moderation says it's a blessing to have good food, good company, good pleasures. But enjoy them in proper quantity. Whether that's watching TV, reading, eating, being with people, sex, study, or whatever brings you pleasure, moderation of these things helps to keep them in proper perspective. Moderation keeps them from consuming your thought life, your energy and your soul. It's cultivating the desire to live simply so that others can simply live.

Unfortunately I have to add this. There are some things that moderation does not apply to. Illegal drug use. Pornography. Violence. It doesn't work to say you'll just have a little bit of these things. They are sources of destruction in and of themselves.

But if gluttony is a sin you battle, fight it with self-discipline from God and guard your hearts with moderation.

I want to end with this. Jesus said, **"I am the bread of life. Those who come to me will never go hungry, and those who believe in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35)**. What are you really hungry for? So often we sense a void within us and so we try everything to fill it. We feel lonely, or afraid, or insecure so we fill that with food, or alcohol, or buying things we don't need. A friend of mine told me about a friend of his who, many nights of the week, will sit at a bar and easily drink 20 or more beers a night. What's he really thirsty for? I don't know him but I wonder.

There's the woman who organizes every day around every meal and how much or how little she can eat. It's all she thinks about. Some days gorging herself. Some days starving herself. What is she really hungry for?

There's the man who keeps buying tools and gadgets, the woman who does the same thing with shoes. What are they really hungry for?

I think we're hungry for life. I think sometimes our gluttony is just a sign that we're trying to satisfy our deepest hungers with stuff that just doesn't last and in the end it kills us. Physically, financially, spiritually. In the end through our over-consumption we end up blinded to people who don't have enough to survive on.

Jesus said, "I'm the bread of life. That void in you, you can't fill with food; you can't fill it with drink; you can't fill it with stuff; you can't even fill it with other people. But I am the bread of life. Welcome me in, and I'll help you see what really matters."

Jesus came so that you might have life and have it abundantly, let him give that life to you. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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