

## Gluttony – Misplaced Hunger

Eccl. 6:7-9; I Sam 2:12-17; Luke 16:19-31

Sherrie Murphree shares this story: “My husband has an almost boundless appetite for ice cream, and it was obvious at a Sunday School party where he helped himself to a good sample of every flavor available. Later during a game time, he was asked: ‘If you could choose any famous couple to be your parents, who would they be?’ His answer came without hesitation: ‘Baskin and Robbins!’”

If you haven’t noticed, I am overweight. I can honestly blame it on my parents DNA, and in particular the food habits of my father’s family of origin. One story is: All baked goods, which were expected and frequent, were always under lock and key. Also, because we were living as missionaries, in the midst of object poverty, we were always expected to finish our plates.

So I come by my weight naturally, or so I like to tell myself. But, I can’t blame all of this round-edness on my parents. As I age, I can’t exercise off my enjoyment of food like I used to easily do. And, I like to eat. So I had interesting emotions as I prepared this sermon about this deadly sin. This topic is as painful for some people as the burps and gas they produce after overindulging at a buffet. Maybe that’s why it was named as one of the seven deadly sins.

Joe McKeever says pastors don’t preach on gluttony for at least 5 reasons. **One** – our hypocrisy is obvious. It’s easier to talk about sins that are easier to hide.

**Two** – the subject is illusive. We like less complex, more practical and easily categorized sins. We can’t assume that just because someone is slender they aren’t a glutton. That’s a superficial view of gluttony. We have to take in account impossible cultural standards of beauty. And aren’t we a contradiction that our society on one hand promotes an impossible tailored form of beauty and on the opposite end we have fried and fast food

available all around us, that encourages us to upsize.

The **third** reason gluttony is not preached about is – there aren’t a lot of direct scriptures using this word. So why is it a deadly sin?

**Four** – our convictions are weak. It’s hard to preach on issues we don’t feel strongly about – since most of us are looking forward to lunch.

**Five:** our answers are fuzzy. It’s hard to give a specific way to fight this sin that suits everyone.

And I would give a **sixth** reason. Gluttony is the sin of self indulgence, which we don’t want to admit, much less talk about. Why? It’s simply food worship. And a focus on excess. But most of all, gluttony ruins our appetite for fellowship with our Creator. It exchanges the glory of immortal God for a Tim Hortons or McDonalds or turkey dinner. For this reason, what’s at stake in the fight against gluttony is not primarily an expanding waistline.

Eternal life is at stake. James condemns the rich who “have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.” Why? (James 5:1-6) Because through such abandonment to the passions of their flesh, they had “fattened [their] hearts in a day of slaughter.” And the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 (19-25) has to be one of the scariest scriptures.

Joe McKeever goes on to offer 3 reasons to preach on this theme. **First** – for health reasons. Obesity is the scourge of our times, the Black Plague of the 21st century. Chairs are being designed to accommodate larger persons. Hospitals are crowded with the multiple diseases stemming from our gluttonous lifestyle. Food companies are doing all they can, with their additives, to get us addicted to their foods.

A **second** reason is scripture. Despite the very few mentions of the word gluttony, there are a number of texts that tie into the theme of gluttony. For example, because the Christians

in Corinth were arguing about eating food offered to idols and fellowship habits, the Apostle Paul wrote, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (I Cor. 10:31) So other issues relate to food. We should ask ourselves, Will my eating please my Lord and bring glory to Him?

**A third** reason to reflect on gluttony, is a life-style and attitude of Godliness is important in how we live. It’s a witness of our faith.

I would add a **4th** reason. We can bring up health concerns and government budgets. Can we do more to subsidize fruits and vegetables so people can afford to eat healthy and reduce health care costs? Can our tax dollars be used to increase more locally grown foods?

**Fifth**, we can learn from the few verses in the Bible that include the **term “glutton.”** The verses listed in the bulletin insert are the sum total of mentions of gluttons in one translation. In fact, the word "gluttony" is not found in some translations. But all 4 texts depict gluttony in a negative light, tying it with drunkenness, bad character traits, & laziness. It’s always important to notice what the Bible links together.

**Sixth**, do we not talk about gluttony because it’s a sin that we like to ignore or at least accommo-date? Christians are quick to label other sins, but for some reason gluttony is somewhat tolerated. We don’t want to embarrass people. We do know being overweight can not always be tied to over eating and bad habits. But as we look at scripture, we discover that Gluttony is tied to all kinds of important parts of life. Did you ever consider the first sin in the Bible revolves around a snack?

**A Seventh** reason to look at this theme is, Gluttony goes way beyond food. For example, Proverbs 23:1-3 has some strong advice. It’s an analogy. A word picture. “When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you. Put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony. Do not crave his delicacies.” That

is quite a warning. Craving a ruler’s, a rich person’s, a politician’s, a leader’s, delightful treats, and favors, is like putting a knife to our own throats, if we are gluttons for what they offer – wealth, power, status, and so on.

So I think the church fathers ranked gluttony as a deadly sin, because we have some sense that a glutton is one who raids the icebox for a cure for spiritual malnutrition. It goes against the fruit of the Spirit – self-control. Gluttony is traditionally, the excess of anything.

Here are three ways to understand gluttony.

**First**, Wanting more pleasure from something than it was made for. **Second**, Wanting it exactly our way. **Third**, Demanding too much from people. It’s an excessive desire for other people’s time, wealth or presence.

I sense ancient truth in the words of Sophia Har. She wrote: “I am not waging war against food. Gluttony is only the manifestation of a deeper discontent. How often have I craved dinner more than good company or turned to chocolate in times of stress instead of the Bread of Life?” “Confronting gluttony means confessing my self-absorption and reordering my loves until Christ becomes my greatest pursuit.”

I think that’s what the Apostle Paul is saying in Philippians as he contrasts two ways of living. “Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizen-ship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” (Philippians 3:17-21)

Gluttony is about more than food, over eating, weight, and pleasure. Instead, Gluttony is about misplaced hunger. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:6, instructs us, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

## **Temperance: Giving Up Control**

I Peter 2:1-2; Isaiah 58:6-12; John 6:30-35

Culture has a lot to say about how we view our bodies. The painter, Michaelangelo, in trying to paint the ideal woman, has them closer to size 12 or 14. This was the ideal woman back in his day. If a size 2 had shown up at his door, he would have thought she was starving to death and would not have found her attractive.

So we have to be careful about getting caught up in unrealistic images of what our bodies should look like when it comes to size, shape and weight. There is no command of Scripture anywhere that says, "Thou shalt be skinny and slim." It's just not in there.

Because, at the root of gluttony is a fear of scarcity that there won't be enough. Gluttony is a sin because it is misplaced hunger and mistrust of God's power and desire to provide for us.

The virtue for gluttony is, temperance. This is the practice of enough. Contentment. Self control. Moderation. What is available is sufficient. The Bible reminds us we need not fear, for God provides all we need. Plus we are to help every one have enough of what they need. St. Thomas Aquinas calls it a "disposition of the mind which binds the passions." It's being hungry for the same values and concerns Almighty God has. The Creator's values are to crowd out our earthly passions.

God commanded lots of feasts for the Israelites attached to celebration and worship. Jesus' first miracle was turning water into extraordinary wine. He was accused of eating with sinners and tax collectors. So there isn't an anti-food, anti-party, anti-social theme in the Bible. But the opposite virtues of gluttony are temperance and abstinence and sharing.

The meaning of temperance is: accepting the natural limits of pleasures and preserving this natural balance. This does not pertain only to

food, but to entertainment and other legitimate goods, and even the company of others. Temperance is defined as moderation, calmness, voluntary self-restraint and self-control. Not striving for too much of a good thing.

Abstinence means a constant mindfulness of others and one's surroundings; practicing self-control, moderation, and doing without. So now it makes more sense why gluttony is a deadly sin. The attitudes of temperance and abstinence are part of self-control and being aware of others. Maybe we could monitor our diets and eating out so that we have more money to help others? Or maybe our tithes should at least match all of our entertainment expenses?

It should not surprise us the Bible and Jesus, uses food to talk about many values and truths. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is to encourage us to take seriously the importance of enough, sharing God's generosity with other, living with God's values, and giving up control.

Sandi Villarreal in the article, Gluttony: Battling a Culture of Convenience, offers another view. When does our reliance upon a constant stream of multi-channel entertainment and instant gratification become harmful? Obsession with a too-much, I-deserve-this-indulgence, instant accessibility-at-all-costs culture just might. When we can have groceries or restaurant food delivered so we don't have to leave our Saturday afternoon binge-watching session, we probably aren't making time for often tedious biblical study and reflection.

When our first inclination in a moment of solitude is to fix our eyes on our electronics, our prayer lives are probably in crisis. Our clinging to convenience is an obvious, but not often discussed, stumbling block to spiritual growth.

The fact is, the Gospel isn't convenient. The Gospel tells us that Christ did whatever - and recruited whomever - was most inconvenient to bring about his plan of salvation. Our response,

then, is not one of convenience either. God doesn't live in a tidy box any more than our worship to God should be confined by the boundaries of Sunday morning. And our tendency toward gluttony impairs the discipline that allows that worship to flourish. Gluttony is not a sin reserved for the portly; it is the reality of a culture that emphasizes overconsumption and steals our attention away from relationships, especially our relationship with God."

Sandi asks, "Will we choose a life of discomfort, inconvenience, and startling grace over the empty culture of too-much? That is my struggle, my sin, my daily repentance."

We can be gluttons, crave a lot of things besides food like work, sports, various entertainment, toys, and so on. Even using family as an excuse to miss spiritual activities can be some thing that gets between us and Jesus. Do all our time saving machines and busyness really cause us to have more time for the things of Jesus? We can think of gluttony as a sin of self-indulgence, not just overeating. Instead may we increase our trust in Lord Jesus. I think this is why the church fathers chose gluttony as a deadly sin.

May we choose the virtues temperance, sharing, and abstinence as ways to fight gluttony and self indulgence, and the traits that go with it. May we not misplace what we are really hungry for.

May we focus, as Romans 12:2 instructs, "To not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

May we frequently be able to say to Jesus: "How sweet are your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps 119:103)

May we increasingly invite stranger and friend and family to, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalm 34:8)

The invitation we had in August of Isaiah 55, is a good counter to gluttony. "Come, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."

Come drink from the Lord's cup and taste his body broken for you. Come and be hungry for the food and drink that always satisfies.