

The Evil Of Gluttony (And Why You Might Not Be Guilty Of It)

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Reading Time: 5 minutes

The “gluttony” card gets played a lot these days. We’ve all heard, “You don’t criticize gluttony enough;” “Gluttony is the most celebrated sin in the church today, especially during high-calorie-count fellowship meals;” “Everyone takes the Bible literally until the subject of gluttony comes up;” “Why do you condemn homosexuality, but not gluttony?”

We should take this charge very seriously. Are we guilty of inconsistency? To wink at some sins while disapproving of others is *hypocrisy*. It is wrong to ignore my own sin while exposing the sins of others (Matt. 7:1-5). We must examine our own lives before removing the “specks” in the lives of others (Rom. 2:1). As Christians, we must hate *all* sins - not just the sins that are easy for us to hate (Rom. 12:9). All sin - from the seemingly petty to the most egregious - will destroy one’s soul.

Yes, we can all agree that gluttony is bad. But what exactly *is* gluttony, and what did God actually say about it?

Food Isn't Bad

You might have a hard time finding “gluttony” in the Bible. Many are surprised to learn “gluttony” does not appear in any of the Bible’s big this-will-keep-you-out-of-heaven lists (cf. Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 1:28-31; Rev. 21:8; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; 1 Cor. 6:9-10). In fact, when the Bible speaks about food, it typically speaks of food in a positive way. When God appointed special times for the Israelites to honor Him, He requested feasts (cf. Lev. 23:2). All food now has been made “clean,” voiding the Old Law’s dietary restrictions (Mark 7:19; cf. Acts 10:15). God intends for His children to enjoy the food He has provided (cf. Gen. 1:29; 9:3; Prov. 24:13; Ecc. 9:7; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:4-5). The New Testament writers are particularly nonchalant about one’s diet and portion control. Food neither commends nor condemns us before God (1 Cor. 8:8). The kingdom of heaven is not defined by food but by contentment in the Spirit (Rom. 14:17). **No one can deny with a straight face that Jesus and His disciples were more concerned about Christians being honest and sexually pure than they were about eating one-too-many Girl Scout cookies.**

“Gluttony” is listed among the well-known “Seven Deadly Sins.” To the surprise of many, this list isn’t found in the Bible. The “Seven Deadly Sins” traces its history back to the fourth century monk Evagrius Ponticus. He actually created a different list, but that list was modified throughout the centuries to eventually be the “Seven Deadly Sins” as it is known today. Evidently, some wish to ignore the Bible by elevating certain sins above others (cf. Rom. 6:23). Evagrius was a known ascetic and monastic, therefore it should come as no surprise that he saw a love for food as a chief evil. Needless to say, the Bible, not some guy in the 4th century, should be the litmus test for determining what is sinful.

Actual references in the Bible to gluttony are fairly obscure. “Glutton” only appears in the Bible four times (Deut. 21:20; Prov. 23:21; Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). The first two instances it appears next to the word “drunkard,” and in the other two instances it is used to ridicule Jesus. “Gluttonous” is used only once (Prov. 23:20), and is again used alongside “drunkards.” “Gluttons” is used twice; once as a quote from a poet to describe the lazy people of Crete (Titus 1:12); once to describe the type of company that will bring someone shame (Prov. 28:7).

Sometimes Paul’s statement in Philippians 3:19 (“their god is their belly”) is quoted to condemn gluttony. In reality, Paul was criticizing those who bound the Old Testament’s dietary restrictions on Christians today and shaming them for what was on their plate (cf. 1 Tim. 4:3-4). “Their god is their belly” is actually in reference to people who had a purely physical view of righteousness before God rather than a spiritual view of holiness. Sound familiar of those today that are eager to condemn “gluttony”? *They* are the ones whose god is their belly.

Gluttony: Worse Than Mere Calories

We must allow the Bible, not culture, to define “gluttony” – otherwise we may become guilty of condemning something God does not (*thus making us very Pharisaical*). What does Biblical gluttony actually look like?

When we carefully examine Scripture, taking time to weigh the relevant passages, we find that gluttony is more than eating an extra sleeve of Fig Newtons.

When we look at the above passages about gluttony, we see an entirely different picture than what is often presented. **The Bible’s view of gluttony should be better understood as lazy, wanton, riotous living without any concern for tomorrow** (cf. Prov. 23:2; Prov. 28:7; 1 Cor. 6:13; Phil. 3:19). Being overweight does not necessarily equal gluttony; in fact, a person who eats two Double Stuf Oreo cookies could be far more guilty of gluttony than the person who eats ten. In reality, the type of gluttony God is concerned about is that of the man who desires to exhaust his life on the pleasures of this world, saying, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32), giving no concern for the Kingdom (Matt. 6:33). **Gluttony, in short, is the sin of idolizing pleasure (cf. 1 Cor. 10:14).**

The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24), who wasted his inheritance on sinful pleasure, was guilty of gluttony. The college student who *lives* for frat parties, thinking that drinking and hooking up is the definition of happiness, is guilty of gluttony. The successful businessman who has sold his soul pursuing more power is guilty of gluttony. The mom who binge-watches soap operas and devours sleazy books of the *50 Shades of Grey* variety is guilty of gluttony.

Yes, the church must preach against the wicked sin of gluttony. And in my experience, we already do. We preach against riotous living, sexual immorality, illicit alcohol and drug use, laziness, gossip, and impurity. Gluttony is looking to anything else but God to give us true, lasting pleasure. We cheapen God’s Word when we reduce “gluttony” to Super-Sizing our fast-food order.

It’s About Stewardship

Christians are God’s servants, using our bodies and influence for His glory (1 Cor. 3:9). We should view our bodies as temples of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9). We should therefore take care of our bodies in such a way to maximize our lifespan, living the remainder of our days serving God. Yes, we need to be careful to eat healthy. Yes, there

comes a point where over-eating can be sinful. Yes, it is good for Christians to exercise and monitor the portions on their plate. But we must be careful not to call something “sinful” when God has not clearly drawn the line. **It isn’t about the quantity of food; it’s about the heart.**

Gluttony can be summarized as the loss of self-control. If we cannot control ourselves (think lust, appetite, anger, covetousness, etc.), then Jesus no longer has Lordship over our lives. The ability to say “no” is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Our appetites shouldn’t control us; rather, we should control our appetite. When our propensity for pleasure controls us, we at that moment become guilty of gluttony.

This meaning of life is about serving Him, not ourselves (Ecc. 12:13). God wants us to enjoy His creation, and we find true pleasure when we live our lives in Christ (John 10:10). Everything was created for our good (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23), but all good things can be used with imbalance, thus bringing us misery (Prov. 25:16).

Conclusion

Worldly people, when they attempt to hide the shame of sin, love to distort the meaning of words. Society justifies adulterous relationships by redefining the meaning of “love.” Society justifies the murder of innocent human beings by calling it “women’s rights.” And it is no wonder then that sins of homosexuality and fornication are defended by pointing to the ever-elusive so-called sin of “gluttony.” Don’t let people bully you as you seek to live a righteous life before God.

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