

## Defining and Defeating Gluttony

Every Christian struggles with one of the seven deadly sins on a daily basis; this is why we are calling this series “The Seven Daily Sins.” In this chapter we will talk about the sin of gluttony. There are two things that make gluttony a difficult topic to discuss: shame and gluttony. When it comes to lust, our society celebrates it. It makes for a great plot line in a romance movie or novel.

According to some economists and capitalists, greed is good; the rich buy a bunch of things and it trickles down to the poor. Pride is probably the ultimate virtue in our society. What is a teacher’s job other than to make our children have good self-esteem, which is just a synonym for pride? There are supposedly some good types of pride, but the word should always be suspicious for a Christian.

But no one thinks gluttony is good. In fact, in our culture, gluttony is the unpardonable. Out of one side of its mouth, society says, “You deserve a break today.” (Cue the kit-kat commercial.) But as soon as you agree and bite through that candy and indulge, they catch you with shame. They condone with platitudes like “Be yourself” and “Follow your heart.” Our hearts tell us to eat real chocolate chip cookies, but they also say, “Don’t you want to be thin?”

Our hearts are fickle. How can we follow our heart’s desires if they are so opposing? Society uses this shame as a motivator to “lose weight” and “eat right.” But that’s not how Jesus handles people. Jesus does not deal with us according to our iniquities (Psalm 103:10). He does not market or manipulate the currency of shame to motivate. It is very difficult to talk about gluttony in light of the gospel because we are surrounded by a society that motivates with shame.

It’s also very difficult because with all the other sins, like greed and lust, the Bible warns us that they are sneaky. But gluttony doesn’t really hide. Gluttony is difficult because it is easy to define: looking to food for that which only God can provide. When the Bible says you can’t serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13), the Greek word for “money” there is *mammon*, which can be used for money or food. In fact,

in those times, rich men didn't always have all their wealth in gold coins; they had it in grain.

The difference between the rich man and Lazarus was that the rich man was feasting and Lazarus was out on the streets competing with the dogs for crumbs. The difference in Jesus's society between the rich and the poor was a lot of food and not enough food. Paul says in Philippians that the belly is oftentimes a god (Philippians 3:19). Jesus says life is more than the abundance of possessions; he also says life is more than food (Luke 12:15).

The definition is not hard to figure out and identifying it in our own lives is also not going to be very hard. The hard part when it comes to gluttony is fighting it. We may be discouraged when we are enslaved to it and it feels like we can't find the key to unlock the shackles of food in our lives. Shame and slavery make gluttony difficult to talk about. The presupposition we must have is that the gospel beats gluttony. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16); when Paul says that, he means that the gospel is the power of God unto sanctification and transformation, and that includes the sin of gluttony.

God wants to remove us from all of our vices and to transform us daily. The gospel can help us dominate our diets rather than letting our diets dominate us. But how? How does the gospel help us dominate diet and why isn't it working? The answer lies in how Jesus deals with shame, the story of the Rechabites in the Old Testament, and a Benjamite from the New Testament, Paul.

### *Shame*

C.S. Lewis said that it would be very easy for any nation or culture to pack a theater for a strip-tease. But what if we were to go to a country where they were able to pack theaters for food strip-teases? Where, instead of a gorgeous woman, there would be a bowl of gumbo or a juicy Baconator on the stage. What would that be like? They would open the lid on top of the box slowly and close it, again and again.

But C.S. Lewis in his day did not know about the internet. We would not have to travel far for that country; it's called the Republic of

Pinterest. And it's not just Pinterest; it's food magazines and the food network. There you are on the edge of your seat, your eyes bulging, heart palpitating, mouth salivating. Wouldn't you think that a country with food strip-teases would be a problem?

This problem is present in America, especially Acadiana, where the number-one tourist attraction is food. Do we have any hope? Yes. Though our society says that we deserve a break today and food is great (and it is, God gave it to us), deep down inside each and every one of us is a little bit of shame when we indulge in that brownie.

Imagine yourself searching through Pinterest. If not Pinterest, perhaps the cooking magazines. In Latin America, tobacco, sugar, and coffee fills the fields. Where they could be growing vegetables and food, they're growing stuff for Americans to smoke, sweeten desserts, and drink. The amount of seafood that our pets eat is staggering. Imagine a malnourished little boy from Latin America standing in your living room and looking over your shoulder as you scroll through Pinterest or flip through that magazine. How would you feel? It's the same feeling you would have if your wife was sitting with you watching that strip tease. It's the same feeling you would have if Jesus were there. If you're honest with yourself, it would be shame. Shame is the currency of our culture.

So what do we do with it? We're not only looking to fill our bellies with food, but also our hearts. Doctors, shrinks, nutritionists, personal trainers, dieticians, and preachers all deal in shame. Our society uses shame to motivate people to not eat so much. (And how's that working?) They say things like, "Did you know that the amount of money we spend on dieting is greater than the gross domestic product of Ireland?"

But what does Jesus do? Jesus does not shame those that society shames. I'll prove it after giving details about the culture Jesus had to deal with. Today, thin is in and fat is out. In Jesus' time that wasn't the case. Thin was out and being overweight was in. It probably had something to do with the association of being thin with being poor. But what's also "in" today is adultery. This world is set up a particular way by the Designer and he says adultery kills and lust is deadly. But our society says different.

However, in Jesus' day, if you wanted to be shamed by society, you would get caught in adultery. How does Jesus deal with the shamed woman? The crowd comes to her, raising their stones in the air, trying to shame her further, but Jesus starts to write in the sand (John 8:3-8). What is he writing? We don't know. But we do know that when he was done, the passion to shame this woman dissipated. They dropped their stones one by one (John 8:9).

Many people assume that he was writing the sins of the crowd or doing something to say to these people they're no better than her. Right before he writes in the sand, he says, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Culture shames the glutton. But I want to write in the sand a bit so that we can all see we have no reason to be shaming others.

### *The writing in the sand*

What I'm going to write in the sand is the different types of gluttony. The obvious one is excessive eating—eating an inordinate amount of food. But did you know the ancient Christians said that gluttony is not just excessive eating, but also being obsessed with food? That manifests itself in many ways in our society. We have entire programs that are designed to take food and then attribute to it a mathematical equation so that people can look at the food not only on a menu or on a plate but on a spreadsheet. They can count and mull over every single calorie, fat particle, and morsel and spend their entire day mapping and plotting their meals down to the very last drop.

The ancients also taught us that there is "sumptuous" eating, and that is demanding that food be "just so"—rich food, having it the way you want. Another type of gluttony is called "daintily eating." We know that the big fat guy with the shirt that doesn't fit and with buffalo sauce on his face and swilling large amounts of beer is a glutton. But the ancients would say that the little priggish granny holding her teacup with her pinky out, who likes her tea sweet, "but not too sweet," who likes a little sugar, "but not too much sugar," is also guilty of gluttony. She is a terror to everyone who invites her to dinner. They set out the food and she

protests and insists that it must be to her standards. That's just as much gluttony as the fat guy with the buffalo wings.

And there's another kind of gluttony called eating impulsively. One type says "your way," but this type also says "right away." Burger King knows what they're doing. They're manipulating two types of gluttony. I think of Star Trek and Captain Jean Luc Picard going up to the replicator saying, "Tea, Earl Grey, Hot." He's not a glutton, it's just tea, right? But the ancients say that gluttony appears as wanting food and wanting it immediately.

Whether you eat excessively, obsessively, sumptuously, daintily, or impulsively, we are all guilty of all in some ways. Because none of us are without sin, let's all drop our stones simultaneously. There is one who can cast a stone, who has no sin, and that's Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21). But he doesn't condemn the woman caught in shame. He also doesn't condone the sin. Right after he says, "Neither do I condemn you," he says, "Go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Our culture condones then condemns—enables then shames. Jesus doesn't do either. Gluttony is a sin; go and sin no longer.

### *Freedom from shame and gluttony*

When Jesus, the creator of the universe, who loves you more than you can possibly imagine and knows your sin, comes to you and says "I don't condemn you," shame dissipates. The world may accuse you, but who can bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies, and if it's God who justifies, who can condemn (Romans 8:33)? Not even your own heart can condemn you (1 John 3:20). Not even society can condemn you. Not even the preacher who's gotten a little ahead of himself can condemn you. This means that the church should no longer use shame as a weapon. The gospel says that we're all in the same boat; we're all guilty (Romans 3:23). Jesus, the one who has been appointed judge over all mankind (John 5:20-30), says, "I don't bring shame to you. In fact, I bear your shame on the cross of calvary." Jesus' opinion of you matters way more than anyone else's. You have to let him remove the shame. Take the shame and plunge it into his grace.

But what about slavery to gluttony itself? This woman is caught in slavery to her lust just like we're caught in slavery to our gluttony. I believe when Jesus said to her "Go and sin no more," from that point on she had victory over her sin. She had been looking for love in all the wrong places. She had been sleeping around with lovers all over town. But when she met Jesus, she found the real love of her soul. She had been drinking from all these wells, but when she met Jesus, she finally drank from the well that fulfills. She had been eating from all these tables, trying to eat, eat, and eat to fill up her heart, but then Jesus came and he was the meal that fully satisfied, that filled her to the full.

I believe that when the gospel of Jesus Christ comes to you and you look Jesus in the eyes, the man who takes your shame instead of shaming you, that's when the shackles of gluttony open. It doesn't mean that you don't deal with it for the rest of your life. But it means diet can no longer dominate you because you have the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ and the gospel within you. There are people in the Bible who prove it: The Rechabites and a Benjamite.

## **The Rechabites**

In Jeremiah 35, God told Jeremiah to bring the tribe of Rechabites to the temple and offer them wine (v. 1-2). When Jeremiah had them in the temple, he brought out the wine. (v. 4-5). But they declined on account of their father's instructions to not drink wine (v. 6). Here we have not people in the South during abolition times, but people of a culture that had no shame in drinking who were able to dominate their drinking habits.

Why and how did they do it? Is it that they had great will power? Did they do it for ego's sake? I heard a preacher once who proudly asserted that never in his entire life had one drop of alcohol touched his lips. But was it for ego's sake? I'm glad that he controlled his drinking habits, but I think he was doing it through the power of pride. That's not exactly what Jesus intends for us. He doesn't intend for us to exchange one idol for the next. Sure, you can beat the idol of gluttony with the goddess of

thinness. You can beat gluttony because you want to be thin more than you want to eat that food.

But the Rechabites did not control their drinking out of ego or pride's sake. We aren't exactly sure why, but there is one hint. Historians tell us that they were a tribe of metallurgists. They would go from town to town and produce whatever the town needed. Their ancestor who first discovered how to work with metal made a rule: Don't ever drink wine. Why? Because when you're drunk on wine, you spill the secrets of the trade.

The point is that they were able to control their love of food and drink because they had a greater love. And that is the key to Christian self-control. The world says, on one hand, "Suppress" and the other "Express." In other words, the way to have self-control is to just say no. But others say, just be you. Just discover who you are and let your colors fly. But the Bible says that the key to self-control is rightly ordering your desires with reality. The most beautiful, attractive provider and provision in this universe is God. And he says to love others as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). The Rechabites went down the list of what they loved most and before they hit food they hit "Keeping the secrets of my family."

### **A Benjamite's control**

How did the apostle Paul control his diet? Was it through ego or through pretending that he didn't have desires? Paul was able to control his love for food with a greater love. In 1 Corinthians 6:12 he wrote, "All things are lawful." Don't you know food is good? In fact, Paul wrote to Timothy and said that people who make up rules about abstaining from food are teaching "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Food is good; God provided it. But there are more categories than right and wrong when it comes to a Christian lifestyle. Even though all things are lawful, "not all things are helpful" and Paul said he would "not be dominated by anything."

Food is good, but Christians are not to be dominated by it. Was he really talking about food? Yes, because the very next thing he wrote is that food is meant for the stomach and the stomach is meant for food,

and God will destroy both (1 Cor. 6:13). Food is temporal and if you look to temporal things for eternal benefits, you're going to lose (Matthew 6:2-5,16, James 5:1-6). Paul concluded his whole statement on controlling your food intake and not being dominated by food in 1 Corinthians 10:23 with this: "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things things are lawful,' but not all things build up." Paul was concerned with whether or not something was edifying to others; that's the third category for living a Christian lifestyle. There's doing right, staying away from wrong, and also doing what builds up others.

Paul was not going to be dominated by food but he was willing to be dominated by the desire to build up others. And what that means is submitting yourself to the law of love (James 2:12). Paul beat his love of food with the love of others. He loved other people because the love of Christ compelled him (2 Cor. 5:14). He loved because Christ first loved him (1 John 4:19). Look at Jesus, who was condemned in your place (Isaiah 53), and know that he loves you. With that love, you can go out and love other people. If he gave up his life for you, you can give up food for others.

Here's the application. 1 Corinthians 10:24-26 says, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.'" In other words, if someone invites you to their house and they put some meat on your table, eat it up. It's all good. But then Paul says in verses 27-29, "If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat for the sake of the one who informed and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his." Paul both ate and abstained out of love for others. He is not being dominated by food but by a higher passion—other people. The way to control your diet and to stop loving food inordinately is to love others and God more.

## **A love greater than food**



How does this work for us? Paul's love for these people is so specific. He's not condoning their behavior or enabling them. It's not that kind of "walking on eggshells" love. 1 Corinthians 10:32 says, "Give no offense to Jews nor to Greeks nor to the church of God." People are more important than food. Paul said he tried to please everyone in everything he did, not seeking his own advantage, but the advantage of many, that they might have been saved (1 Cor. 10:33). Getting down to it, he both ate and abstained specifically that the others he did it for might be saved.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9 that if you're an athlete running for a gold medal, you submit everything to that one prize (v. 25). If you're going to win it, you have to control what you eat. People who go into the Olympic games have controlled what they've eaten for four years. Not only their eating, but their exercise, their relationships, and their schedule. Everything in their entire lives submits to one thing. Paul said he ran because he was running for a prize (v. 26-27).

Some people butcher the meaning of that; they say he was running for salvation. But that would go against everything Paul ever taught us. He ran for an imperishable crown (v. 25). What is that crown? 1 Thessalonians and Philippians 4 reveal that the people in the churches were his crown. That's the prize he ran for. He submitted everything is his life, pummeling his body so that he might not be disqualified from the race (v. 27), specifically so that others might see the gospel of Jesus Christ in him.

How then do we eat in such a way of loving others and leading to their salvation or at least not impeding it? To Paul it meant not eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. We don't have that issue. I think what it means is that when we sit down to eat, either with others or alone, we have compassion at the forefront. The rich man ate and feasted at his table while the poor man had nothing (Luke 16:19-31). If you want to sit down and eat for the love of others specifically so that they might be saved, eat with compassion.

Another way is moderation. When we eat in moderation, we declare, "I'm eating to fill my belly, not my heart. That means I can cut it

off at any point. Jesus is my ultimate satisfaction; he is the one who has filled me up. I don't need this to live. Life is more than food." We eat with moderation, hospitality, and compassion, loving others more than our persnickety dieting habits. We eat with health, declaring that God created the body and it's a good thing. We eat realistically, not eating comfort food. We don't need to calm our anxieties; Jesus Christ is our salvation. When we eat in these ways, not only do we communicate the gospel with our mouths, but also with our actions.

### **Eating with thanksgiving and love**

The Bible is all about food. The beginning is about God spreading a banquet at the garden of Eden. The very end of the Bible is the marriage supper of the Lamb, where God and man eat together in fellowship. In between there's manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16), water turned to wine (John 2:9-10), ravens bringing bread (1 Kings 17:16), a widow and cakes (1 Kings 17:12-15), and more. In fact, the entire liturgical, levitical calendar was filled with festivals where people ate food (ref).

But the food in the Bible is really about God who provides that food. When we sit down to eat, we don't look to that food as the provider of life. We look through it to the provider, through the gift to the gift-giver. When we eat with thanksgiving, it will change the way we eat. And when we eat with thanksgiving, we nonverbally communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ, saying that God is more glorious to us than the meal.

The best way to control your breakfast and lunch intake is to schedule a wonderful dinner. What will you then do for breakfast and lunch? You save room. You control yourself for a greater love. Control your diet for a greater passion. When you're eating, save room for dessert. "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 43:8).

Food is not just to reveal to us God as the provider; it points us to Jesus as our ultimate provision. That fruit hanging on the tree in the garden is really pointing to the fruit hanging on the tree at Calvary. That bread from heaven was pointing to Jesus Christ who was the bread that came down from heaven (John 6:32-33). That Passover lamb was pointing

forward to the ultimate Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). When you look at food, look through it to the ultimate sustenance, Christ.