

“THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS” GLUTTONY

This morning in our series on the Seven Deadly Sins we come to the sin of gluttony. It is likely that you’ve never heard a sermon on gluttony, and I know that I’ve never preached on it, but it’s something we all can relate to because we all eat, and some of us really, really like to eat.

When I was growing up, whenever we made a trip up to Portland, my dad liked to eat at the Old Country Kitchen. Anybody ever been there? It’s still going today, and if you go, you won’t be disappointed. The Old Country Kitchen was well-known for their steaks – the menu was even in the shape of a steak – and the restaurant was always packed. It was also famous for its 72 oz. steak challenge. Anyone could walk in off the street and order a 72 oz. steak meal, and if they could eat it in one hour or less, they got their meal for free. You not only had to eat the steak, but a baked potato, a salad, and slice of bread, and some onion rings. If you finished in less than an hour, you not only got the meal free, you also got a free T-shirt and were inducted into the restaurant hall of fame. They say that over 1,900 people have taken the challenge, but only about a third have finished on time – 601 men and 10 women have achieved the feat. They didn’t say how many had heart by-pass surgery immediately afterwards.

Some people are professional eaters and are part of an official sports league that travels around to various eating contests – the most famous being the Coney Island hot dog eating contest. The record is 73 hot dogs in ten minutes.

Gluttony is a Latin word that means “to gulp down.” It’s the idea of gulping or inhaling food or drink beyond what is necessary or appropriate. How many of you ate beyond what was necessary or appropriate this week? Eating 72 oz steaks and 73 hot dogs are extreme examples of a kind of overindulgence that has taken over our culture.

George Will said, “American life resembles a giant all-you-can-eat buffet offering calories, credit, sex, intoxicants and other invitations to excess. Americans accept these invitations so promiscuously that bad decisions about smoking, eating, drinking and other behaviors account for almost half of U.S. deaths in our losing war with ourselves.”

This morning we’re going to talk about three things. One, the root of gluttony and understanding why we overindulge; two, the consequences of gluttony and how it harms us physically and spiritually; and three, the solution to gluttony and what we can do to gain victory over it.

Each of the seven deadly sins begins with a legitimate desire of something good, but becomes sinful and deadly when it moves beyond its proper boundaries and limitations. Gluttony begins with the natural, God-given desire for food and drink – something God gave us not only to survive, but to enjoy. We know that because he created our tongues with between 2,000 and 10,000 taste buds, that make eating so enjoyable.

In the Bible food and drink are symbols of God’s blessing. In the garden of Eden God blessed Adam and Eve with an abundance of trees with fruit pleasing to the eye, and He told Adam and Eve, “Enjoy. Eat from any tree you want, just don’t eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

God would design the Jewish calendar to revolve around seven feasts or festivals. It was a time to come together in worship of God, and celebrate with good food and drink.

The Promised Land was described as a land of “milk and honey.” It was a land of abundance. Deuteronomy 8:7-9a says, “For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land... a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing.” Food was a picture of God’s blessing and abundance.

The coming kingdom of God on earth is pictured as a lavish banquet. The prophet Isaiah said, “On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines” (Isaiah 25:6). Jesus used the same picture when He said in Matthew 8:11, “I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Revelation 19:9 talks about the saints of God enjoying the marriage supper of the lamb. The food we enjoy now is just an appetizer of what is to come.

All these verses show us that God is pro-food and from the beginning eating and drinking was God’s idea – and we need not feel guilty for enjoying what God has made good. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” I remember someone praying over a meal one time and they said, “Lord, thank you that you made something so necessary to our bodies so enjoyable.” Food is a wonderful blessing from God.

Eating and drinking becomes gluttony when we overindulge – when we take a God-given natural desire and take it to excess. The prodigal son is a good example – he took his father’s inheritance – something good – and went out and spent it on excessive living – he ate too much – he drank too much – he spent too much – he indulged his sexual appetite with prostitutes – he took a good thing and sinned by overindulging.

When we overindulge in food or drink or on spending or on binge-watching TV, it’s a sign of something deeper going on beneath the surface. The French philosopher, Pascal, said that inside the heart of every man there is a “God-shaped vacuum.” If it is not filled with God, it will be filled with something else.

The woman at the well, in John 4, tried to fill the spiritual void in her life by indulging in relationships – going from one man to the next – but she was empty. Jesus uses the analogy of water to show her how the true needs of her soul can be filled. He said, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14).

Only God can fill our deepest longings and desires. After Jesus feed the 5000, the crowd followed Him to the other side of the lake and wanted more food. Jesus said, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” (John 6:27).

Jesus says that seeking spiritual satisfaction – food that endures – is more important than seeking temporary physical satisfaction – food that spoils. Another place we liked to eat growing up was the buffet restaurants like King’s Table and Hometown Buffet. You walk in with good intentions to not overdo it, but as you go through the line you keep seeing things you want, and before you know it your plate is all filled up, so you grab another plate. It all tastes so good in the moment, but on your way home you feel miserable and bloated. Food is no different than other addictions where the pleasure center of the brain is activated and it says, “More, more, more.” But the pleasure we experience eventually wears off and we’re left empty.

Jesus says, “I have come to fill the vacuum inside with something permanent, that doesn’t fluctuate.” In John 6:35 He says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Jesus came down from heaven to be the bread of life – to fill us with all the things we long for – peace and joy, fulfillment and contentment. Psalm 34:8 says, *“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”* Find out how satisfying God is.

Satan – our enemy – works overtime to divert our attention away from God and fill our lives with temporary things like food. The very first temptation in the Bible was a temptation to eat food forbidden by God. Satan said, “Eat it and you will find life – don’t look to God for satisfaction, find satisfaction by taking what you desire.”

The first temptation of Jesus in the wilderness also involved food. Before He began His ministry, Jesus fasted from food so that He could completely focus on God and the mission before Him. Matthew 4:2-3 says, “After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’” Satan hits Jesus, who is fully human, at His greatest point of vulnerability. He’s been fasting for 40 days and is literally starving to death.

Notice how Jesus answers, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Yes, a loaf of bread would sure be good, and yes, food is a blessing from God – but there’s something more important to me than bread, and that is fellowship with my Father.

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3 where God let Israel go hungry in the wilderness to test their trust in Him. Unlike Jesus, they panicked. They murmured. They grumbled. “Give us bread!” God provided them manna from heaven, but only enough bread for one day at a time. They were not to gorge or hoard food, but daily trust Him. He was teaching them that bread is temporary – hunger is temporary – but their fellowship with God is eternal. Food spoils, but a relationship with God lasts forever.

The root of gluttony is seeking to fill ourselves with what only God can fill. God gives us food and drink to enjoy, but it becomes sinful when we overindulge as a way to fill the void. God wants us to guard against gluttony, and any kind of overindulgence, because it carries with it a number of harmful consequences.

The first consequence is **bondage**. When we overindulge our bodies with food or drink or whatever satisfies our flesh, we become enslaved and addicted to what rewards the pleasure center of our brain. In 1 Corinthians 6 the Apostle Paul writes to a group of Christians in Corinth that lived in a culture of excess, where people gave themselves over to the natural desires of their bodies – to sexual desires as well as desires for food and drink.

In verse 12 he says, “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12). Paul says, “I have freedom as a Christian to eat or drink what I want to the glory of God, but I will not let food or drink master me.”

Anything can become your master – you can be mastered by money, you can be mastered by sex, you can be mastered by gambling, you can be mastered by drugs, you can be mastered by your phone, you can be mastered by alcohol, and you can be mastered by food – any indulgence can quickly become an addition that enslaves you.

There's a story told of a duke who lived in the 14th century in the area today known as Belgium. His name was Raynald III, and Raynald loved to eat, and over time he grew extremely obese. Raynald's younger brother led a revolt against him and had a prison cell built around him. It had no bars on the windows and no locks on the door, but Raynald could simply walk out but he was too large to fit through the normal sized door.

The younger brother told Raynald when he went on a self-enforced diet and lost enough weight to walk out the door, he would be restored to his wealth and would receive his crown back. But every day, the younger brother had delicious meals delivered to the prison room, and Raynald continued to eat. He eventually died in the prison cell, a prisoner not of lock and key, but a prisoner of his own appetite. God wants us to walk free and says, "Don't let anything become your master. If you don't master food and drink, it will master you."

The second consequence of gluttony is, not surprisingly, **poor health**. My doctors have told me for years that a key to good health is keeping my weight in control, because being overweight contributes to a number of problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and depression. It's also listed as a risk to severe illness from Covid. According to the CDC, 73% of Americans are overweight or obese – about double what it was 50 years ago. This doesn't mean that everyone who is overweight is a glutton – we all have different metabolisms – some can eat a lot and not gain weight and others – and others, because of their genetic makeup, struggle to keep off the pounds.

Gluttony has kind of become the accepted Christian sin – it's seen as something that maybe something we shouldn't do, but it's far down the line on the sin chart. There's a story about Charles Spurgeon – the great English preacher – who was known to smoke cigars. D.L. Moody, the evangelist from America visited Spurgeon one day and saw him puffing on a cigar and said, "When are you going to stop smoking those things, they'll going to kill you." D.L. Moody was a large man and overweight, and Spurgeon poked his friend in the belly and said, "I'll put down my cigars when you put down your fork." Ouch. We're quick to call out sins in other people we don't struggle with, but tend to excuse sins like gluttony that are just as harmful to our bodies.

The third consequence of gluttony, according to Proverbs, is **poverty**. Solomon says, "Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags" (Proverbs 23:20-21). Not taking care of our bodies zaps our energy and effectiveness to work and produce, and it puts a burden on others.

Solomon gets very graphic in Proverbs 23:1-3 when he says, "When you sit to dine with a ruler, note well what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony. Do not crave his delicacies, for that food is deceptive." There are better ways to deal with gluttony than putting a knife to your throat, but Solomon gets his point across that we not give into gluttony lest it take us down the path of destruction.

The fourth consequence of gluttony is **it hinders our spiritual purpose**. God has left us on earth to glorify Him – and to be His representatives to the world who does not yet know Him. How we treat our bodies – and how we present ourselves to the world – is a part of our witness. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?" Paul says, "Your body is sacred space – the Holy Spirit of God lives in you – so treat it well."

We're here on a mission from God, and in order to effectively serve Him we need to take care of our bodies, and make sure that it does not become enslaved to addictions that will slow us down and take away the strength and energy we need to serve God and others.

What then do we do about gluttony? What's the solution to overindulgence? Each of the seven deadly sin is matched by a positive, godly virtue – and the opposite of overindulgence is **self-control**. Self-control is one of the nine fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5, and living a self-controlled life is evidence that the Holy Spirit lives in us and controls us. This is what Paul means in Ephesians 5:18 when he says, “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”

We all know what happens to a person filled with alcohol – it takes over their body and controls them and leaves a wake of destruction. Paul says, “Do not let alcohol or food control you. As a Christian the Holy Spirit of God has now taken control of your life, and because He lives in you, you have a power you never had before. You have the power to say “no” to sin and “yes” to God. It's not a matter of will-power, but a matter of yielding control of your life to God.”

Solomon says, “Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control” (Proverbs 25:28). Our mouth is like a wall through which we let in food and drink, and self-control is guarding what we allow to enter. The Greek word for self-control used in Galatians 5 has a dual meaning of restraint and discipline. In our fallen nature we have impulses and desires to indulge, and as gatekeepers, we must act with restraint. It's the opposite of “If it feels good, do it.” The prodigal son showed no restraint in going to a distant land, blowing his inheritance, and losing everything.

Self-control is not just about restraining yourself from doing something bad for you, but the discipline to do what is good for you. Someone defined self-control as “doing the right thing regardless of how you feel in the moment.” Athletes know that if they're going to compete and win on the field, they have to be disciplined off the field. They may not feel like getting up early, eating right, and lifting weights, but they know that discipline is the path to success.

Self-control is one of the most important virtues we can learn, because it generates power and energy to do good and productive things. If a river is controlled and stays within its boundaries, it generates incredible power and energy – it produces electricity, provide irrigation, and fill reservoirs. But when the water of a river runs over its banks, it becomes a swamp. It must be controlled to produce good.

There are two powerful principles that can help us control gluttony. They are both rooted in God's Word and they have been tried and proven over centuries as key ways to learn self-control. The first is the principle of **delayed gratification**. Our brains are wired to seek instant gratification – to taste something, to buy something, to feel something. But delaying gratification sacrifices immediate pleasure for greater satisfaction later. The ultimate example in the Bible is when Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. He gave into his immediate desire for food and forfeited his entire future.

There's a very famous experiment on delayed gratification conducted in the 1960s at Stanford University. Researchers selected 600 4-year-olds and put each child in a room alone with a single marshmallow in front of them. The children were told that if they could wait for 15 minutes and not eat the marshmallow, then they would be rewarded with another marshmallow. Each child was faced with the same dilemma we face every day, “Do I eat the one marshmallow now, or do I wait and get twice as many?”

You can watch some of these kids on you-tube and you can see their struggle. Some kids covered their eyes so they wouldn't see the temptation, some tried to divert themselves by singing or talking to themselves, some played with the marshmallow in their hand, some sniffed it and put it up to their lips. Some couldn't resist and went ahead and ate it.

Of the 600 children in the experiment, only 30% of them were able to wait. But the point of the experiment was to track the developmental progress of the children into adolescence and young adulthood. The 30% who practiced self-control were better adjusted socially, more dependable, and in high school, scored significantly higher on their SAT tests. The marshmallow experiment showed that delayed gratification affects every area of life. One pediatrician said that if you want to raise successful, happy, well-adjusted kids, the single most important thing you can teach them is delayed gratification. It doesn't take much effort to give into our impulses, but it's hard to resist instant gratification. But those who learn to do the hard things first and experience the pain now, will be rewarded with greater pleasure in the future. Sometimes we must simply do the right thing regardless of how we feel in the moment.

The second principle of self-control is the idea of **advanced decision making**. When is the absolute worst time for you to go grocery shopping? When you're hungry. You're not thinking straight and you'll buy everything that's not bolted down. The idea of advanced decision making is to get alone with God and when you're of sound mind, surrendered to the Holy Spirit, you make the key decisions of your life in that state. You don't make the key decisions of your life when you're hungry or lonely or bored.

Proverbs 21:5 says, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." This applies to every area of overindulgence. It applies to spending – instead of buying whatever shiny thing comes across your path, you have a budget. You plan ahead so you don't go into debt. It applies to sexual purity – if you're dating, you decide ahead of time what your boundaries are – you decide when you're thinking straight, not in the heat of the moment. And it applies to eating and drinking. If you're overindulging food, you get alone with God and pray, and you come up with a game-plan of when you will eat and how much you will eat. By just paying attention to delaying gratification and advanced decision making, it can radically change the way you live.

Food is good – it's a wonderful blessing from God for us to freely enjoy. But overindulgence is a deadly sin that leads to bondage and poor health, and keeps us from fulfilling God's purposes for us on earth. If you're a believer, you have power to control your desires and impulse. You don't have to be a slave to food. With the Holy Spirit of God living in you, you can have victory over gluttony and be free to serve and glorify God.