



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

What Does the Bible Say about Gluttony?

By Kyle Pope

There are seven passages in English translations of the Scriptures that use forms of the word “glutton.” Each of these demonstrate principles that help us determine when eating food is proper and when it has become “gluttonous” and displeasing to God.

Scriptures Addressing Gluttony

The first passage comes in the Law of Moses. It commanded that a “**stubborn and rebellious**” son was to be stoned after his parents presented him to the elders of the city as one who “**will not obey our voice**” and who is “**a GLUTTON and a drunkard**” (Deut. 21:20, emphasis mine). While this law is not restated under Christ, we may infer that gluttony is unacceptable before God in that it was included in behavior worthy of capital punishment. We should note its connection here with two other things: (1) disobedience, and (2) drunkenness. This is not a son who enjoys a good hearty meal—it is a rebel who does not control himself, or yield to his parents’ authority. We see this same focus in a second passage on gluttony in the book of Proverbs. The wise man declared, “**Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of GLUTTONS shames his father**” (Prov. 28:7, emphasis mine). In this text, gluttony is contrasted with keeping God’s law and described as something that compromises family relationships. It is a type of indulgence in food (much like indulgence in drink) that hinders proper observance of God’s word and leads to association with behavior shameful to one’s family and to himself.

The final Old Testament passages on gluttony focus less on family relations and more (as in our last passage from Proverbs) on the people with whom gluttony leads a person to associate. This behavior can have devastating consequences. The book of Proverbs warns, “**Do not mix with winebibbers, or with GLUTTONOUS eaters of meat; for the drunkard and the GLUTTON will come**

to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags" (Prov. 22:20-21. NKJV, emphasis mine). Once again we see here the connection between gluttony and drunkenness, to which the Holy Spirit adds the practical warning about its outcome. When the glutton thoughtlessly consumes his provision he comes to **"poverty"** (left without the things he needs), and **"drowsiness"** (induced by his excess), leaving him clothed only in **"rags."** Here the glutton does not enjoy food as the fruit of his labor, but his laziness and overindulgence deprive him of what he really needs. In each of these Old Testament passages "glutton" or "gluttonous" translates the Hebrew word *zalal* (זָלַל) meaning "to make light of, squander, be lavish with" (BDB). The issue is not enjoyment of food, but excess and waste.

The first New Testament passages on gluttony are probably drawn from this last warning in Proverbs. Jesus was falsely accused of being **"a GLUTTON and a winebibber"** because He associated with **"tax collectors and sinners"** in order to teach them (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34, emphasis mine). "Glutton" in

these two passages translate the Greek word *phagos* (φάγος) meaning literally "an eater," from the verb meaning "to eat." The Latin Vulgate used the word *vorax* here, from which our word "voracious" (meaning "insatiable") is derived.

This accusation against Jesus is informative. Was He really a **"glutton and a winebibber"**? Of course not, but in contrast to the austere lifestyle John the Baptist was commanded to practice (Luke 1:15), Jesus drank grape juice and ate normal foods rather than **"locusts and wild honey"** (Matt. 3:4). The Jewish leaders, however, set a standard of austerity for Jesus the Law did not demand. Jesus was not wasteful, lazy, overindulgent, or engaging in food and drink to the point that it hindered obedience to God's word. Their accusation was false, but their misuse of the term "glutton" shows that gluttony does not consist in simply eating with friends, or engaging in wholesome enjoyment of food, but in abuse, excess, and self-indulgence.

The final passage in the New Testament comes in a warning to the evangelist Titus, while he labored on Crete. Paul quotes a proverb circulated about the island's inhabitants—**"Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy GLUTTONS"** (Titus 1:12, emphasis mine). For the word "gluttons" this text uses the word *gastēr* (γαστήρ) meaning "belly," used here in the sense of "a man who is as it were all stomach" (Thayer). It's connection with the term **"lazy"** echoes the warnings of Proverbs. These are men unwilling to work, but always ready to eat. Dishonesty and brutish behavior accompany their idleness and overindulgence.

Defining Gluttony

What do these passages indicate about how to determine whether we are practicing gluttony or not? Let's observe four principles taught in these and other Scriptures that provide a definition. Gluttony involves. . .

1. Laziness and Waste. A punishment man was given when cast out of the garden was **"toil"** in order to provide food for himself (Gen. 3:17). When labor results in food for the body there is no sin in partaking of it with joy. Three times, in various forms the Preacher in Ecclesiastes tells us, **"It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun"** (Ecc. 5:18; cf. 2:24; 3:13). To give oneself to indulgence in food and drink while refusing to work is gluttony.



Olsen Park Church of Christ

The Cretans were **“lazy gluttons”** (Titus 1:2) and the wise man warned that gluttony leads to **“poverty”** and **“drowsiness”** (Prov. 22:21). If the rebellious son would not obey his parents’ voice (Deut. 21:20), we can infer that he was indulging in food and drink when he should have been working. When Paul warned the church in Thessalonica to withdraw from those walking in a **“disorderly manner”** (2 Thess. 3: 11, 6), the example he cited of this conduct was that they were **“not working at all”** (2 Thess. 3:11)—of whom he commanded, **“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat”** (2 Thess. 3:10). This was gluttony, even though it had little to do with the amount they ate. They had an improper attitude toward food. In the parable of the prodigal son, the young man **“wasted his possessions with prodigal living”** (Luke 15:13), and found himself not only in **“poverty”** (Prov. 22:21), but in hunger (Luke 15:16). He had probably lived in gluttony, but we may learn from his father’s response that it was not gluttony for his father to kill the **“fatted calf”** so they could **“eat and be merry”** (Luke 15:23).

2. Lack of Self Control. The apostle Peter taught, **“by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage”** (2 Pet. 2:19). Paul declared, **“All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any”** (1 Cor. 6:12). The child of God should avoid slavery to anything other than righteousness (cf. Rom. 6:18-19). Proverbs taught, **“Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, lest you be filled with it and vomit”** (Prov. 25:16). Gluttony is habitual eating to excess. It’s frequent association with drunkenness illustrates this. Like those who **“linger long at the wine”** (Prov. 23:30) gluttons **“gorge themselves on meat”** (Prov. 23:20, NIV). Paul taught Christians, **“having food and clothing, with these we shall be content”** (1 Tim. 6:8). The glutton is never content. Like the drunkard anxious to **“seek another drink”** (Prov. 23:35), the belly of the glutton is never satisfied.

The Roman emperor Vitellius, who reigned for eight months in AD 69 epitomized this type of gluttony. The Roman people called him *patinarium*, a name for a glutton that meant literally “pile of dishes” (Seutonius, *Life of Vitellius* 17). One of his predecessors, Galba claimed he “thought of nothing but eating” and warned that his “bottomless gullet might be filled from the resources of the province” (ibid. 7). The Roman historian Seutonius claimed that he ate numerous times a day, using emetics (i.e., drugs to induce vomiting) in order to allow him to eat more even after he was full (ibid. 13). That was gluttony! It is little wonder that the wise man contrasts gluttony with obedience to God’s law (Prov. 28:7)—one so enslaved to foods cannot serve, worship, and honor God—his

energies are wholly consumed by his desires.

3. Poor Stewardship of the Body.

The wise man warned of indulgence that can lead to the point of nausea (Prov. 25:16) and a gluttony induced stupor causing **“drowsiness”** (Prov. 22:21). 200 years before Christ the Jewish scribe Joshua ben Sira echoed the same warnings. In the apocryphal book known as *Ecclesiasticus* (or the *Wisdom of Sirach*), he wrote, “Do not be greedy for every delicacy, and do not eat without restraint; for overeating brings sickness, and gluttony leads to nausea. Many have died of gluttony, but the one who guards against it prolongs his life” (37:29-31, NRSV). He saw the wise man’s connection between gluttony and **“drowsiness,”** writing, “Healthy sleep depends on moderate eating, he rises early and feels fit. The distress of sleeplessness and of nausea and colic are with the glutton” (31{34}:20). Clearly, the body needs food, but excess is harmful. Long before doctors knew about cholesterol and high blood pressure the Holy Spirit taught moderation rather than gluttony. The Christian is taught, **“your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own”** (1 Cor. 6:19). Our bodies are a stewardship from God. Gluttony abuses the body rather than using it in prudent service to the Lord.

4. Misplaced Devotion. Plato claimed that when, “the desire for food prevails over the higher

reason and the other desires, it is called gluttony” (*Phaedrus* 238a-b). We noted above that the word translated “**gluttons**” in the Cretan proverb of Titus 1:12 literally means, “belly.” The Greeks had coined a word for this type of person—he was *philogastoridēs* (φιλογαστορίδης) “one who loves his belly.” This reminds us of Paul’s warning to the Philippians—**“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things”** (Phil. 3:18-19). To make one’s “belly” his god, is not just talking about food. Paul told the Romans that those who “**cause divisions and offenses**” serve “**their own belly**” (Rom. 16:17-18). In the context of talking about sexual immorality,

Paul said, **“Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body”** (1 Cor. 6:13). The “belly” is man’s appetite. Just as the fornicator craves the sexual appetites of the flesh, the glutton craves the culinary appetites of the flesh. To crave material things to the hindrance of spiritual things is wrong! The glutton is a materialist. His concern is with “**earthly things.**” This was true of Esau. He was a “**profane person**” because “**for one morsel of food**” he “**sold his birthright**” (Heb. 12:16). He was a glutton, more concerned with a moment of indulgence than his future well-being. He served his belly.

Conclusion

We have seen that gluttony involves more than just a healthy enjoyment of food. It is characterized by improper attitudes towards God’s word, respect for authority, prudence, self-control, and one’s relationship to his own body and the material world. Each Christian must search his own heart and examine his own behavior to determine, “am I a glutton?” We can’t always look at another person and truly determine if his or her attitudes toward food constitute gluttony or not. A person’s weight can have causes that have nothing to do with gluttonous attitudes. The variability of each person’s metabolism has a huge bearing on the amount of food our body needs to function. At the same time, as with all behavior regulated by Scripture we must never excuse or overlook something we should correct in our own lives because of its difficulty or inconvenience. God has blessed us with bodies to use in His service. Let us honor this stewardship as faithful servants of our Master.



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