

Spiritual Poisons, part 5, FOOD IDOL
November 20, 2016



Reginald III was the ruling duke of Guelders, a region of land that today lies in the Netherlands. When Reginald died, in the year 1371, his two sons fought over the right to rule. Raynald was next in line, but Edward defeated him. Edward built a room around Raynald, a room with windows and one door. But Raynald, who had the nickname "Raynald the Fat", was so large he could not fit through the door or windows. The door and windows were not locked. Raynald could get out, and become the ruler of Guelders, if he lost enough weight to fit through the door.

However, Edward knew of Raynald's love of food. So every day, he had lots of rich food brought to Raynald, who ate and ate and got even bigger. When Edward died 10 years later, Raynald was released, by tearing down one of the walls of the room. He became ruler then, but was in such ill health that he died several months later. Anytime someone accused Duke Edward of treating Raynald cruelly he said: "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills." Raynald was a prisoner of his own appetite.

We are in a series of sermons on sins of the heart. Jesus warns us that these sins lead to other, outward sins. These heart sins have plagued mankind since the beginning of human history. We see this in God's record of early man.

Genesis 6:5 (NIV) The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

The topic this morning concerns food. The desire for and use of food can be dangerous to the Christian. We have a close connection to food since we depend on it to feed our bodies. However food carries dangers that we need to guard against.

Are you a prisoner of your appetite? Are you a slave to food?

The old word for this subject is gluttony. The word gluttony comes from the word glut, meaning an excess of something. We usually use the word to speak of a glut of some commodity on the open market. There might be a glut of oil or a glut of wheat, a glut of milk. When we have a glut of some commodity in the world, the price for it usually goes down, because there is more than enough to meet demand.

The opposite of a glut is a shortage. This past Sunday's newspaper reported a world shortage of pure vanilla. So over the last year the price of pure vanilla extract has skyrocketed. I will be using imitation vanilla in my Christmas cookies.

Gluttony is defined in the dictionary in this way...

Gluttony = to overindulge, especially by eating; consistently consuming more than one requires.

Gluttony is allowing ourselves to be ruled by our appetite for food.

Before we look at what gluttony is, it is good to know what gluttony is not. Gluttony is not:

- **Gluttony is not eating in moderation food that is considered “bad” for you, such as fat-laden foods or sweets.**
- **Gluttony is not having extra portions if you are still legitimately hungry.**
- **Gluttony is not occasional Feasting.**

A few days ago many of us feasted. It was a thanksgiving feast. We were doing what God told the Israelites to do several times a year. They were to gather together, before God, to observe how God had blessed the nation. There were special offerings and rituals connected to these gatherings. And among these activities was feasting. You may be familiar with the feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the Feast of Pentecost. There was also the feast of the tithe. They were to bring a tithe of their crops, grains, oil, and wine, to the tabernacle and eat it there before God.

Gluttony is not occasional feasting. There is a time for feasting. But that time is not every day. Feasting every day would be gluttony.

Now to what gluttony is. **Gluttony involves the misuse of food. As such, gluttony is a form of idolatry.** Idolatry comes in many forms. What the forms have in common is that we worship something of the creation instead of God, the creator. We trust in something material instead of trusting in God. We were created for a relationship with God. But in idolatry we fill God's place with something else. In the case of gluttony, we seek in food something we should be seeking in God.

This series of sermons are about heart sins. Gluttony is first a heart sin. There is something in the heart that is not right.

And don't make the mistake that gluttony is always seen. Not everyone who is guilty of gluttony is overweight. And not every overweight person is guilty of gluttony. There are other reasons people may be overweight other than consistently eating more than their body needs. Some medications cause people to put on weight. Some physical conditions cause the body to swell with fluid, giving the appearance of being overweight.

There are many people who sin the sin of gluttony who do not look overweight on the outside. Whenever I say something about being on a diet, people disagree with me. Just because I am not overweight does not mean I do not struggle with food issues.

As with everything God created, food can be used correctly or incorrectly. What is food for? Food is needed to nourish and energize our physical bodies. But it is not a constant need. We need air constantly. We do not need food constantly.

Therefore we should not be eating all the time. Our bodies need a limited amount of food each day. We should not daily be taking in more than we need. We do that at a feast. But we are not to be feasting every day.

Gluttony is a stewardship issue. God has enriched us with the money to buy food, and our land is full of a variety of rich foods. That does not mean it is good stewardship to eat as much as we want. This is poor stewardship of the resources God has entrusted to us.

Gluttony is slavery to our appetite, involving a lack of self-control, which is a spiritual issue.

In Paul's letter to the church in the city of Corinth, he mentions the use of food and the need for self-control. This concluding statement comes after a long passage about various kinds of idolatry, some involving the misuse of food and sex.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV) "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

How many times have you read that verse, like me, and only focused on the "whatever", but not the specific, "eat or drink"? God made us for his glory. We are to bring glory to God. We do that by loving Him, trusting Him, giving thanks to Him, and obeying Him.

We sin when we use food in a way that does not glorify God.

This is what Jesus was tempted to do in the desert. Jesus had been in the desert for 40 days, fasting and praying, preparing for His teaching ministry. At the end of the 40 days He was hungry and the devil pointed to some of the small, brown, roundish stones on the desert floor, similar in shape and size to the common barley loaves of bread. The devil suggested that Jesus turn them into bread.

This would have satisfied Jesus' hunger. But it would not have brought glory to God. So Jesus refused, reminding the devil that,

Matthew 4:4 (NIV) "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus knew, no matter how hungry we are, that food is not of prime importance. Getting food by any means, just because we need it, does not bring glory to God. We bring glory to God with food by trusting Him to meet our needs. Jesus had been trusting God to keep his body going for 40 days without resorting to misuse of His power. God could keep him alive as long as necessary, all without eating any physical food. God would be glorified as Jesus trusted God to meet the needs of His body. The same is true in our lives. This is a lesson we need all to learn.

One form of gluttony is habitually eating more than we need.

We were not made to feast everyday. Our priority must be to bring glory to God with our food. Our priority must not be to always feel full. Some have fallen into the trap of having to feel full in order to stop eating. For most of us, feeling full comes after we have eaten more than enough to meet our bodies' needs. We must learn to practice self-control and stop eating before we feel full.

A second form of gluttony is using food as a substitute for God.

The young woman had always been athletic, playing various sports throughout high school and college. However, after 10 years of marriage, she found herself in a place she never imagined she'd be. She was very overweight.

The problem began when her mother died. She became depressed and turned to food to numb her pain. When she ate, she felt better. So soon those moments of temporary pleasure became a continual feast. She ate when she was lonely, bored, sad, or

stressed. She even resorted to hiding food and bingeing when no one else was home. Food became her comforter, her friend. Food became her god.

She was a Christian, but instead of turning to God in her grief, she was turning to food. We have a special term for food when we idolize food. We call it comfort food.

Food is a blessing, a unique creation that God provides to nourish our bodies so that we're physically equipped to serve Him. But if we make food more than sustenance to us, we have moved into idolatry.

As Christians, God has put His Spirit in us. **Jesus calls the Spirit The Comforter.** (John 14) That was not just a casual title. The Spirit indeed serves as a constant companion, ministering God's comfort to us in all the heartaches of life. The Holy Spirit is the antidote to gluttony. Ice cream can only bring you comfort. The Holy Spirit can comfort, give guidance, and strength to face whatever it is you are facing.

When we are in need of comfort, we are to turn to the Spirit, not food. If we turn to food, or something else, in place of God, this is sin. This is idolatry. If you have a habit of turning to food when you're sad, lonely, or depressed, you're guilty of idolatry.

I know this sin. I am guilty of it often enough. When I am frustrated, or anxious, or worried, (sins in their own right if carried too far) instead of turning immediately to God, I tend to turn to food.

Are you bound to food as a substitute for God? We need more self-control. God means for us to find victory over temptation and sin in our lives. This victory will come as our self-control increases.

We don't create self-control just by wanting it and trying harder. Self-control is one of the characteristics of Jesus that the Holy Spirit creates in us over time.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

My intent this morning, is not to make you feel more depressed that you have a food problem. My intent is to point you to the source of help, my source of help. The Lord is our strength. We must learn to lean upon Him.

Jesus died to pay for this sin. You are forgiven in Him. Rejoice in your forgiveness. And turn to Him, not in despair, but in faith. Ask Him to produce self-control in you.

Develop strategies to try to work with Jesus in defeating food temptations.

Begin to practice fasting, skipping a meal, or a snack, in order to pray. Like Jesus, depend on God to meet your energy needs.

Write yourself reminders to pray when you are sad, lonely, anxious, or frustrated. Put these as sticky notes on your refrigerator, on the cookie jar, on the potato chip bag.

Set a time of day that you end your eating. Some women were meeting together in a weight-loss group. An older woman was losing lots of weight and was asked by one of

the younger women how she did it. "Easy," she replied. "I just take my teeth out every evening at six."

A similar strategy, if you still have your teeth, is to do your nightly brushing after you finish supper instead of waiting until bed time. Eating an evening snack means having to brush again. I hate that. Once an evening is enough for me.

There are many such helps to use. But prayer is the key. Bring this problem to Jesus every day. He wants to solve it as much as you do.

Invitation:

When we became Christians, we came to Jesus in our sin, admitting our need for a savior, a rescuer, and putting our lives into His hands as Lord.

You can do that today, as we go to prayer. You can give your sinful self over to Jesus who died for you.

Christians, we need to do every day what we did the day we were saved. We first trusted in Jesus for justification. Now trust Him for sanctification. Every day, come to Him, admitting your weakness. Give yourself to Him. Ask the Spirit to transform you, so you can bring glory to God with your day.