

What About Gluttony?

In this rather dark period in church history, there is a determined effort to ignore things that are serious sins and instead focus on other matters. For example, if you try to point out that homosexuality is repeatedly condemned in the Bible, people will say “Oh yeah? Well, what about overeating? That's a sin, you know! Why aren't you condemning all the fat people in the world?”

Do you see how this game is played? People try to change the subject. They want to ignore the very plain words of Scripture and instead focus on something else – anything else. This is something that we should not tolerate. We should not allow ourselves to be led off-topic so easily. Instead, we should call people out on what they're doing, and refocus ourselves.

But since the church is so determined to ignore sins like divorce, adultery, fornication, and homosexuality, and instead condemn people for being fat, let's take a moment and see what the Bible actually has to say about gluttony. Is it really a sin to be overweight?

It may surprise you to find out that the word “glutton” only appears four times in the KJV Bible. (It does appear one more time in other versions, but that is a translation error on their part.) Let's take a look at these four occurrences and see what they say.

First of all, it turns out that gluttony, overeating, and being fat is not mentioned *one time* in the entire Mosaic Law. Even though there are hundreds of commandments, “eating too much” doesn't make the list. Keep in mind that this is the same Mosaic Law that strictly forbids things like eating blood:

Leviticus 7:27: “Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people.”

And that goes into great detail about what to do if you find mold in your house:

Leviticus 14:35: “And he that owneth the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, It seemeth to me there is as it were a plague in the house:

36 Then the priest shall command that they empty the house, before the priest go into it to see the plague, that all that is in the house be not made unclean: and afterward the priest shall go in to see the house:

37 And he shall look on the plague, and, behold, if the plague be in the walls of the house with hollow strakes, greenish or reddish, which in sight are lower than the wall;

38 Then the priest shall go out of the house to the door of the house, and shut up the house seven days:

39 And the priest shall come again the seventh day, and shall look: and, behold, if the plague be spread in the walls of the house;

40 Then the priest shall command that they take away the stones in which the plague is, and they shall cast them into an unclean place without the city:...”

There is a lot more in this chapter, but you get the idea. The Mosaic Law has more than *six hundred* commandments, addressing what to eat, what to wear, when to bathe, and so forth. Not a single one of them has anything to say about overeating. The closest we find is this:

Deuteronomy 21:18: “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:

19 Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;

20 And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.

21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

Is this passage recommending the death penalty for people who go back for seconds at the buffet line? Is it saying we should stone to death people who eat dessert? Of course not! This passage is saying that if parents have an incredibly rebellious child, who refuses all correction and who will not listen to anyone, they are to bring him to the elders of the city so that he can be put to death. Since this person refuses all correction and will not obey anyone's rules, he is a danger to society and should be executed before he can start harming other people. (Of course, in our day we've developed a better way to handle this situation: we do nothing, and allow these hoodlums to murder, rape, and assault people. Then we give them reduced prison sentences because “they had a bad childhood” and set them free so that they can murder, rape, and assault even more people. The idea of executing these obvious maniacs *before* they leave a trail of bodies in their wake is unthinkable to us. We care about the murderer far, far more than we care about his victims.)

This passage is *not* saying “He didn't order a salad, so kill him.” It is saying “Find these dangerous, rebellious maniacs and kill them before they have a chance to start killing others.” It is dealing with *rebellion*, not overeating. That should be very clear from the very first verse in the passage.

That is the only mention of gluttony in the entire Mosaic Law. The next time it gets mentioned is in the book of Proverbs. This is what we find:

Proverbs 23:20: “Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh:

21 For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.”

This passage says that if you spend your time going to drinking parties, where people get plastered and engage in debauched behavior, you will come to poverty. The word “glutton” here is Strong's #2151. This is what it means:

“to shake (as in the wind), figuratively to be loose morally, worthless, or prodigal; flow down, vile, glutton, riotous eaters, riotous”

Yes, it is true that the word “glutton” is included in that definition. However, the basic idea behind the word is *not* “a man who eats too much”. It instead refers to a morally loose person who is riotous and out of control, and who will not listen to anyone.

You have to understand that if the Bible wanted to condemn eating too much, it would have been incredibly easy to do that. All the Bible would have to do is say “Eating too much is a sin” or “Being overweight is a sin” or “If you don't eat a healthy amount then you are an evil person.” If the Bible has the time to talk about what to do if you find mold growing in your house, then it surely has

the time to talk about being fat. But that's not what we find, is it?

There are two more mentions of gluttony in the Bible, and they are both in the New Testament. Here they are:

Matthew 11:19: “The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”

Luke 7:34: “The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!”

That's right! Half of the uses of the word “gluttonous” in the Bible are used *in connection to Jesus Christ*. If you examine the context of these two verses, you will see that the Pharisees condemned John the Baptist because he drank no wine and ate only locusts and wild honey. Because of his strict diet, they accused him of being possessed. Jesus, on the other hand, enjoyed a wide variety of food and drank wine, so they accused Him of being gluttonous and a winebibber.

Incidentally, have you noticed that in the Bible you *never* see the word “glutton” used by itself? It's always used in conjunction with drinking wine. The two are always connected: gluttony is something that is done at wild drinking parties, where people are drunk and doing debauched things. Every use of that word appears in that context, and I do not believe that is an accident.

Now, at this point some people like to bring up Proverbs 23:2 and claim that it condemns overeating. But if you read the entire passage I think you'll see that it doesn't make that case at all:

Proverbs 23: “When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee:

2 And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.

3 Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat.

4 Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.

5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.

6 Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats:

7 For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.

8 The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.”

Is this passage saying “Having an appetite is bad, because it makes you fat, and being fat is sinful?” Of course not! This passage is talking about what to do if you are invited to eat at a ruler's house. In that situation you should be very careful, because the riches that you see in front of you are deceitful and even dangerous. You should not desire his wealth and you should not eat the food of the wicked. The whole point of this passage is *don't desire the wealth of the wicked* (you do see verses 4 and 5, right?), not “going back for seconds is a sin”. Anyone who takes verse 2 out of context and uses it all by itself is doing a grave injustice to the point of this section.

Believe it or not, that's everything that the Bible has to say about overeating. Every single time that the Bible talks about gluttony it does so in the context of drinking parties. Even the word that is translated as “glutton” refers to someone who is immoral and rebellious; it is *not* a synonym for “being

fat”.

As you can see, it's rather hard to claim that eating too much is a sin. There simply aren't any Scriptures that clearly say that. Yes, going to drinking parties and engaging in riotous behavior is clearly a sin, but when people talk about being gluttonous that is *not at all* what they have in mind. No, most people define gluttony as eating too much fat and not enough salads. If a person goes back for seconds or eats dessert then they are living in sin. If a person is fat then they're *clearly* living in sin. The justification for all this is that since our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, we ought to take care of them. If we're being overweight then we're not taking care of our bodies, and so we must be living in sin.

Now, it's true that the Bible does say our bodies are temples of the Spirit, but even that isn't a reference to gluttony – but I'll get to that in a minute. Let's pause for a moment and think about the argument that is being made. If being overweight really is a sin then that has a whole list of very difficult complications. Have you really thought this through?

For example, if being overweight is a sin, then how, exactly, do you define “overweight”? After all, the Bible certainly never puts any kind of limits on a person's weight. When people talk about eating “too much”, what does that mean? Since God never gave us a definition, do we just use the government's definition? Do we use some sort of body mass index indicator? Is there an acceptable calorie count? If we don't eat very much in each individual meal but are still gaining weight anyway, does that mean we need to exercise regularly to burn off those extra pounds, or else we're living in sin?

How do we know at what point we've become “fat”, anyway? Different societies throughout time have had different ideas of what is and isn't an acceptable body weight. Even today the science is far from settled. Are we supposed to just accept whatever the current cultural standard is and use that? Past societies tended to be more accepting of heavier people, whereas today we frown upon that. Were these past societies living in sin because their definition of fat differed from ours? Who draws the line, and where is it drawn? Do we need to perform scientific studies to determine the exact point where fatness starts?

What about societies that don't have an advanced understanding of biology? It may not be immediately obvious that being, say, 30 pounds overweight is a health problem. People 500 years ago may have had no idea that what they were doing had any health risks at all – especially since the Bible never explicitly says that being overweight is a sin, and never offers any definitions of what being overweight even was. Does that mean that it wasn't a sin back then, but it is now because we have a better understanding of biology? Or was God angry with them their entire lives for committing a sin that the Bible never warned them about?

Remember now, the wages of sin is *death*. Sin is a grievous offense to a holy God; it is an extremely serious matter. In fact, it is so serious that God expects us to choose *torture and death* over sin. Other sins have a very clear line: it is easy to tell if you have lied, or if you've murdered someone, or if you have committed adultery. But at what point does it become a sin to eat that slice of bacon? Is there a point in each meal where if we eat one more bite, we're sinning against God and deserve to be sent to Hell? Is there a point where if we don't start exercising, we are sinning against God and ought to be struck dead where we stand for our rebellion? Since God never gave us any definitions for “being fat”, how can we possibly know where that line is?

Sure, it's easy to look at someone who weighs 500 pounds and say “What on earth is wrong with that person?” But most people don't fall into that category, do they? A lot of people are overweight (by the government's definition) by maybe 30 or 40 pounds. Some are more than that, certainly. Is being overweight by 30 pounds a terrible sin against God? Since the Bible never draws the line (or even hints about where the line might be), then what standard do we go by? For that matter, why would God make it a sin to not have a health body weight, and then not give us any standard for what a

healthy body weight even was? For all you know, God's idea might be completely different from ours. You think I'm kidding here, but if the difference between sin and obedience is 5 pounds, then *we need to know that*. But we don't know that, do we?

Let's suppose that doing unhealthy things is a sin. Well, not exercising isn't very healthy. If you are physically weak, does God require you to exercise, since being out of shape isn't healthy? Is "not exercising" also a serious sin against a holy God? What exercises (and how much) does God require? Are certain exercise routines more holy than others? If we do the wrong exercises, are we in sin? Likewise, some people sit down a lot at work. Sitting down isn't terribly healthy either. If we don't stand up more at our job, are we sinning against God? If we don't start walking around, are we living in serious sin?

Now Christians have a whole bunch of things to worry about, don't they? At what point have they exercised enough to not be sinning against God? How much walking is enough to avoid His wrath? How much do they need to stand up in order to avoid profaning His holiness? At what point in each meal does it cross from being an enjoyable meal to being a sin against the Father?

There's really no way to tell, *because the Bible never mentions any of this*. We've made it all up. We've become like modern Pharisees: we've invented an entirely new sin where it's all but impossible to know if we're actually honoring God or not. Yet, the sins in the Bible are all extremely clear, black and white things: don't worship idols, don't murder people, don't commit adultery, don't lie, and so forth. Yes, the Bible does say we should take care of our bodies because they are the temple of the Lord. But it doesn't say that in the context of overeating. Instead, it actually says this in the context of *prostitution*:

I Corinthians 6:15: "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.

16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.

17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Is this passage talking about overeating and not exercising? Absolutely not. It is talking about *sexual sin*. Verse 18 says that every single sin a person does is outside of his body. There is only one sin that a person does against his own body, and *it is not overeating*. It is fornication – sexual immorality.

Now, it is really easy to tell if we've been engaged in *that* sin. That sin has very clear boundaries. But what we've done is invent an entirely new sin – being overweight – and put it on par with having sex with a prostitute. We've then added the idea that not exercising is *just as bad*, even though it's never mentioned anywhere in the Bible.

Yes, it is true that we are to exercise self-control. That is indeed one of the fruits of the Spirit. We should not let our desires control us; instead we should control our desires. But what we've done with the modern interpretation of gluttony has gone very far beyond that. Oh, we don't have much to say about homosexuality, or divorce, or sexual immorality, or the fact that a couple has been living

together for 9 years, has three children, and has never bothered to get married. But Bob over there is overweight, and that is *clearly* a grievous sin against God.

You would think that if being overweight was such a terrible sin against our bodies, that God would have mentioned it at least once in the 31,000 verses that are in the Bible. Since sins are worthy of eternal damnation in Hell, you would think that God would have posted clear limits on how much each person can weigh. At the very least He should have said *something*. When God talked about sins against our bodies in I Corinthians 6:15-20, He could have said there were *two* sins against our bodies – fornication and overeating. But He didn't, did He?

Am I the only person who has grave doubts about this entire matter? Does no one else see how ridiculous this all is? I fear that we are straining at gnats and swallowing camels. Yes, you should avoid living on a diet that consists solely of twinkies and bacon. But we have gone much too far, in an area where the Bible has extremely little to say. We even condemn people for not exercising – a practice that God never even *suggests* His followers should be doing. In fact, the one mention of exercise in the entire Bible has this to say about it:

1 Timothy 4:8: “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

That's hardly a strong endorsement of exercise, is it? Yet we condemn people for being overweight, but don't condemn them for failing to study their Bibles – even though God *repeatedly* commands us to meditate upon His Word. We have little interest in whether our fellow Christians are seeking godliness, but we care a great deal about how much they weigh and how much exercise they are getting – which is a *reversal* of what I Timothy 4:8 has to say. I fear that we have lost sight of what is important, and instead have focused on things that have very little spiritual importance.