What About Gluttony?

There are some churches that seem to make a determined effort to ignore serious sins and instead focus on other matters. For example, if you point out that divorce is condemned in the Bible they might say "Well, what about gluttony? That's a sin, you know! Why aren't you condemning all the fat people in the world?"

To me it looks like these people are trying to change the subject. They want to ignore the plain words of Scripture and focus on something else. Since this tactic is so common we need to be aware of it and not tolerate it. We must not allow ourselves to be led off-topic so easily.

However. since some churches insist that gluttony is a serious sin, let's take a moment and see what the Bible actually teaches about this subject. If people are going to bring this topic up then we need to know the truth of the matter.

The word "glutton" only appears four times in the KJV Bible. (It does appear one additional time in other versions, but I believe that's a translation error on their part.) Let's take a look at these four occurrences and see what they say.

First, it turns out that gluttony isn't mentioned *one time* in the entire Mosaic Law. Even though there are hundreds of commandments, gluttony doesn't make the list. Keep in mind that this is the same Mosaic Law which 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."

This same law goes into great detail about what to do if you find mold in your house:

Leviticus 14:35-40: "And he that owneth the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, It seemeth to me there is as it were <u>a plague in the house</u>: 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: And he shall look on the plague, and, behold, <u>if the plague be in the walls</u> of the house with <u>hollow strakes, greenish or reddish</u>, which in sight are lower than the wall; Then the priest shall go out of the house to the door of the house, and shut up the house seven days: And the priest shall come again the seventh day, and shall look: and, behold, <u>if the plague be spread</u> in the walls of the house; 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's a lot more in this chapter but you get the idea. The Mosaic Law has more than *six hundred* commandments. It addresses what to eat, what to wear, when to bathe, and so forth. Not a single one of them has anything to say about gluttony! The closest we find is this:

Deuteronomy 21:18-21: "If a man have a <u>stubborn and rebellious son</u>, which <u>will not obey</u> the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, <u>will not hearken</u> unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and <u>bring him out unto the elders</u> of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and

rebellious, he will not obey our voice; <u>he is a glutton, and a drunkard</u>. And all the men of his city shall <u>stone him with stones, that he die</u>: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

Is this passage saying that anyone who goes back for seconds at the buffet line should be executed? Is it saying we should stone people to death if they eat dessert? Of course not! Under the Mosaic Law, if parents had a rebellious child who refused all correction and wouldn't listen to anyone, they were to bring him to the elders of the city so he could be put to death. Since this person refused all correction. he was a danger to society and should be executed before he caused serious harm to others.

This passage isn't saying that since he ordered ice cream instead of a salad he should be killed on the spot. Instead it's saying that the Mosaic Law required the Israelites to find people who were on the road to becoming a dangerous manic and kill them before they started killing others. These verses are dealing with rebellion and criminal activity, not overeating. That should be clear from the first verse of the passage.

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

> **Proverbs 23:20-21:** "Be not among <u>winebibbers</u>; among <u>riotous eaters of flesh</u>: For the drunkard and the glutton shall <u>come to poverty</u>: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

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

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

It's true the word "glutton" is included in that definition. However, the basic idea behind the word is *not* "a person who eats too much". It instead refers to a morally loose person who's riotous and out of control, and who won't listen to anyone.

If the Bible wanted to condemn eating too much, or being overweight, it would have been incredibly easy to do so! All we would need is a simple verse that says "Eating too much is a sin" or "Being overweight is a sin" or "If you don't eat a healthy amount then you're wicked." 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're 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 <u>gluttonous</u>, 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 <u>gluttonous</u> man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"

That's right! Half of the times the word "glutton" is found in the Bible it's used to *describe Jesus Christ*. If you examine the context of these two verses you'll see that the Pharisees condemned John the Baptist because he drank no wine and ate only locusts and wild honey, and they condemned Jesus because

He drank wine and enjoyed a wide variety of food. Since John the Baptist had a strict diet the Pharisees accused him of being demon possessed (Matthew 11:18), and since Jesus *didn't* have a strict diet they accused Him of being a glutton.

I want to bring attention to the fact that the Bible never uses the word "glutton" by itself. Instead it's always used in conjunction with drinking wine. The two are connected: gluttony is something that's done at wild drinking parties where people are drunk and doing debauched things. Every use of that word appears in that context, and I don't believe that's an accident.

Some people may bring up Proverbs 23:2 and claim that it condemns overeating. However, if you read the entire passage I think you'll see that it doesn't teach that at all:

> **Proverbs 231-8:** "When thou <u>sittest to eat with a ruler</u>, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, <u>if thou be a man given to appetite</u>. Be not desirous of his dainties: for <u>they are deceitful</u> meat. <u>Labour not to be rich</u>: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. Eat thou not <u>the bread of him that hath an evil eye</u>, neither desire thou his dainty meats: For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words."

Is this passage saying that it's wicked to have an appetite because that makes you fat, and being fat is sinful? Nope! These verses are talking about what to do if you're invited to eat at a ruler's house. In that situation you should be very careful because the riches you see in front of you are deceitful and dangerous. You shouldn't desire his wealth and you shouldn't eat the food of the

wicked. The whole point of this passage is *don't desire the wealth of the wicked*, not "going back for seconds is a sin". Anyone who takes verse 2 out of context and uses it by itself is doing a grave injustice to the point of this passage.

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

This is why it's difficult to claim that eating too much is a sin. There just aren't any Scriptures which teach that! Going to drinking parties and engaging in riotous behavior is clearly a sin, but when people talk about being gluttonous that's usually not what they have in mind. Many people seem to define gluttony as eating too much fat and not enough salads. There are a number of pastors who teach that those who are fat are living in sin, even though there aren't any verses in the Bible which teach that. Their justification for teaching that being overweight is a sin seems to be that since our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit we ought to take care of them. If we're overweight then we're not taking care of our bodies and therefore must be sinning.

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. However, before discussing that let's pause for a moment. If being overweight is a sin then that brings up some very difficult complications.

For example, if being overweight is a sin then how do you define "overweight"? The Bible 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 are we just supposed to use the government's definition – and what do we do if that changes? Are we supposed to use some sort of body mass index? Is there an acceptable daily calorie count? If we don't eat very much but are still gaining weight anyway, does that mean we have to exercise to burn off those extra pounds or else we're living in sin?

At what point are we considered "fat" in the sight of God? Different societies throughout time have had different ideas of what is and isn't an acceptable body weight. Since God hasn't given us a definition, are we supposed to accept whatever the current cultural standard is and use that? Past societies tended to be more accepting of heavier people, whereas today that's frowned upon. Were these past societies living in sin because their definition of fat differed from ours? Who draws the line, and where is it drawn?

What about societies that don't have an advanced understanding of biology? It may not be immediately obvious that being 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 says that being overweight is a sin and never defines "overweight" or "eating too much"*. Does that mean it wasn't a sin in those days, but it *is* a sin today because we have a better understanding of biology? Was God angry with them their entire lives because they were committing a sin the Bible never warned them about?

Remember, the wages of sin is *death*. Sin is a grievous offense to a holy God! It's an extremely serious matter. It's so serious that God requires us to choose *torture and death* over sin. The other sins listed in the Bible are pretty clear. It's generally easy to know if you've lied, or murdered someone, or committed adultery. But at what point does it become a sin to eat another piece 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're sinning against God and deserve to be struck dead where we stand? Since God never gave us any definitions for "being fat", how can we possibly know at what point God becomes angry? After all, it doesn't matter if *we* think a person is fat or not. What matters is God's view – and yet the Bible is silent on this topic.

Why would God make it a sin to not have a health body weight and then fail to tell us what weight He required us to maintain? For all we know God's idea might be completely

different from ours, because His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). If the difference between sin and obedience is 5 pounds then *we need to know that*. Yet the Bible has nothing to say about this.

There are some people who teach that doing unhealthy things is a sin. For example, it's unhealthy to not exercise. Does God require you to exercise because 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 living in sin?

There are also some people who sit down a lot at work. Spending your whole day sitting down is pretty unhealthy. If we don't stand up at our job are we sinning against God? If we don't start walking around are we living in sin? At what point have we exercised enough to not be sinning against God? How much walking is enough to avoid His wrath? How much do we need to stand up 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 no way to tell *because the Bible never mentions any of this*. People have made it all up. They've become modern Pharisees, inventing an entirely new sin where it's impossible to know if we're honoring God or not. The sins that we find listed in the Bible are pretty clear: don't worship idols, don't murder people, don't commit adultery, don't lie, and so forth.

The Bible does teach that we must take care of our bodies because they're the temple of the Lord. However, it doesn't say that in the context of overeating. Instead it says this in the context of *prostitution*:

> **I Corinthians 6:15-20:** "Know ye not that <u>your bodies are the members of Christ</u>? shall I then take the members of Christ, and <u>make them the members of an harlot</u>? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one

body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. <u>Flee fornication</u>. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but <u>he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body</u>. What? know ye not that <u>your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost</u> which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 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's talking about *sexual sin*. Verse 18 says that every sin a person commits is done outside of his body. There's only one sin that a person does against his own body, and *it's <u>not</u> overeating*. It's fornication – sexual immorality.

It's pretty easy to tell if we've engaged in *that* sin because it has very clear boundaries. The modern interpretation of "gluttony" has created an entirely new sin (being overweight) and put it on par with having sex with a prostitute. Some pastors teach that not exercising is *just as bad*, even though it's never mentioned anywhere in the Bible!

The Bible simply doesn't teach that if we do anything which has negative consequences to our health then we're committing a sin. Instead it says there's only *one* way to sin against our body, and that's through sexual immorality. God could have told us that making unhealthy life choices is a sin but He didn't.

It's true that we must exercise self-control. That is indeed one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). We must never allow any of our desires to control us, but instead must learn to control our desires. If we have no control over what we eat, or what we drink, or what we watch on TV, then we have a problem. It's also possible that if we lack self-control, a side effect of that might be weight gain. However, I think it's difficult to argue that being overweight is a sin all by itself. The Bible just doesn't teach

that.

If being overweight was a terrible sin against our bodies then surely God would have mentioned in at least one of the *31,000* verses which are in the Bible. Since sins are worthy of eternal damnation in Hell then you would think God would have given us clear limits regarding how much each person could weigh before he put his soul in danger. When God talked about sins against our bodies in 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, He could have said there were *two* sins against our bodies – fornication and overeating. But He didn't, did He?

Instead we find passages like this:

Psalm 92:12-14: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be **fat** and flourishing;"

Proverbs 11:25: "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

Proverbs 13:4: "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat."

Proverbs 28:25: "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat."

Isaiah 58:11: "And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."

If being fat is a horrible sin against God then why does God call it a blessing that He gives to the righteous?

It's certainly wise to avoid a diet that consists solely of twinkies and bacon. But I think some churches have gone too far in an area where the Bible has extremely little to say. Some pastors condemn people for not exercising – a practice that God never even *suggests* His followers should be doing. In fact, the only mention of exercise in the Bible has this to say about it:

> **1 Timothy 4:8:** "For <u>bodily exercise profiteth little</u>: 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?

Some churches 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 (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2, 63:6, 77:12, 119:15, 119:23, 119:48, 119:78, etc.). In some churches there seems to be little interest in whether our fellow Christians are seeking godliness, but a great deal of interest regarding how much they weigh and how much exercise they're getting – which is a *reversal* of what 1 Timothy 4:8 teaches! I fear these churches have lost sight of what's important and instead are focusing on things that have little spiritual importance.