

Gluttony

Dave Bast:

Nobody wants to think of themselves as a glutton. Of all the seven deadly sins, this is probably the one that is most personally embarrassing; but do not be too quick to excuse yourself from it, and think, “Well, at least I don’t have trouble with that one. I am fit and trim and lean.” No; let’s stop and think about what this sin actually involves. That is what we are going to dig into today on Groundwork.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are in the midst of a series, Scott, on the seven deadly sins. We are very near the end of it, now. In fact, we have come to sin number six, which is the sin of gluttony. I want to pause here before we dig into this one and talk a little bit about why we are doing this. Why do we want to focus so much on sin? It is not to try to make people feel bad about themselves; it is not to try to hurt people’s feelings. This is an especially hard one because some of us maybe have trouble with our appetite. Obesity is a problem in the country and that is one form, perhaps, of gluttony, but it can be more complicated than that, too. There are often psychological or even medical problems connected with that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One of the things I think we have been trying to emphasize in this series, and we want to do it here as well – as well as in the final program, which will be on the deadly sin of lust – we want to emphasize that another reason to think about this is because a lot of the things that get disordered, a lot of the things that get corrupted by sin, are things that, in and of themselves, are good things; are gifts of God that, because they get corrupted, end up becoming a problem, but that is not why God gave them to us. He gave us possessions; He gave us the blessings of our lives, which we thought about when we thought about greed in the previous program. Now we are thinking about food and drink, which are gifts of God; gifts of God’s creation; often used in scripture for celebrations: The new kingdom; the new creation; the prophets would always envision it as a banquet, a feast. So, eating, drinking, enjoying, is not a problem; but if it gets disordered; if the Devil can get a foothold and turn it into a problem, well now we do not have access to the good part of God’s creation.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is right, and we are also trying to apply scripture, or as we like to say on this program, dig into scripture to help us shape our lives in conformity to God’s word. I have a wonderful quote from Calvin that hangs on the wall of my office, in which he says, “The word of God was not given to us to render us eloquent or subtle, but for the reformation of our lives.” You know, a lot of people think of Calvin as this big, heady, cerebral, it is all speculative doctrine and predestination, and all that. No; his big concern was: Let’s get our lives in line with God’s purposes for us. That is the way toward the blessing that God intends finally for us all. It is all joy in the end; it is all pleasure.

So, that is what we are trying to do. We are not trying to make people feel guilty; we are not trying to hurt people’s feelings. These are all things that we struggle with ourselves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Of course, we are mindful of the fact that here in the western world too much food – too much rich food – is a problem; but we are well aware of the fact that there are a lot of places in the world where people cannot get decent food; they cannot feed their children; they do not overindulge; they could not get enough no matter how hard they try. So, that too is a reminder that food and drink is finally a gift.

You can be a glutton for money; you can be a glutton for pleasure; you can be a glutton for....

DAVE BAST

A glutton for punishment.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For shoes... Yes, but we do tend to think about food and drink with gluttony; and it is interesting; far more of us, certainly in the West, in North America, far more of us have a problem with this sin than we think, because as you said, if you think it is only about someone who is really overweight, you are missing what the monastic tradition, what the people who put the list of seven deadly sins together knew, and that is that there are a lot of different ways to abuse food. In our culture, we can see it on the high end and the low end.

On the high end today, you have the Food Network, and you have these gourmet restaurants. You have gourmet restaurants where people pay \$300.00 a plate and the chef in the kitchen assembles the food now with tweezers and with these little forceps to make the plate so elegantly designed; that is eating with too much fuss. The ancients always said that was gluttony.

On the low end, we have drive-thrus at the fast food lane where we eat without thinking at all; we just stuff it into our mouths and never give thanks for it. So, eating with too much fuss, eating with too little thought; all of us fall into those things, and that is gluttony as well.

DAVE BAST

Every glutton does not necessarily look like Jabba the Hutt, you know; this gross mountain of... as Falstaff said in Shakespeare, "A mountain of mummy." There are plenty of skinny gluttons around. There are gluttons who have 12-stall garages attached to their house. There are gluttons who are treating food as if it is pornography; this beautiful photography. Simply stated, gluttony means pandering to our physical appetites; making too much of them; indulging them excessively; or, as you put it, fussing too much about them. When that happens, in that instance, we have made an idol out of the satisfaction of our own appetites.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, and as is always true with an idol, what happens then is we do not give thanks; and we will talk later about ways to eat thoughtfully and with thanks; but what happens whether you are just paying way too much attention to the food, like these high-end restaurants, or way too little attention to the food, like the hamburger you are shoving into your mouth while you are driving 65 miles per hour down the freeway; either way, you are not giving thanks to God, who is the Giver of all good things. That blocking of gratitude is always near the base of a lot of sins. And again, as we have said, these seven deadly sins are attitudes and they are the attitude we take toward life; in this case, food and drink; and what it does is it dries up gratitude.

DAVE BAST

I think, too, if we stop and consider it – step back from the personal level – we will come to the realization that we are all caught up in this; that we live a gluttonous lifestyle because we live in a gluttonous society. All you have to do is think about the waste that fills Western culture, Western society.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it breaks your heart when you bring that into how much food these buffets throw out; perfectly good food, really, but they cannot keep it. When you bring that alongside of what I said earlier of all these cultures and countries where they cannot even find enough bread or gruel to feed their children, and you consider how much we throw away, it is part of a whole system.

DAVE BAST

Not just food, but energy, oil, water, natural resources...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Plastic...

DAVE BAST

Yes, just the junk that we accumulate; the mountains of garbage; the oceans of trash; they testify to a gluttony that runs throughout modern industrial society. In Dorothy Sayers' words – we have mentioned her on earlier programs, her wonderful little book on the seven deadly sins – she refers to all of the slop and swill that pour down the sewers over which the palace of gluttony is built.

Our entire society is built on this premise that you use it up, you gain more, you buy, you consume, you throw it away so you can buy new; and it makes us all gluttons.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of that advertising slogan, I think it was for Lay's Potato Chips, or something, but the tag line was: Don't worry; they'll make more. So, you do not have to worry about your food; you do not have to give thanks for it; there will be another bag or potato chips tomorrow.

What we want to do, then, is think a little bit about self control and slowing down, and how do we do that as Christians. We will think about that when we come back.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are thinking about the sin of gluttony, which can be overeating, overindulging, but as we have been saying, Dave, it is also eating with a little too much fussiness or eating with no thought at all, and the point being, you are not giving thanks to God for the good gifts; and how can we, in a culture, which as we said before, is wasting food and other resources at a colossal rate, how can we slow ourselves down long enough to get that gratitude back as a regular component of our lives; especially when we eat and drink?

DAVE BAST

Well, yes, it is like Paul says in Philippians 3, he has this really kind of pungent expression in a verse there, where he talks about people who's god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, and that is really gluttony; when you are worshipping your own appetites and your own indulgence, even if you are doing it with small amounts. In fact, you could make an argument that people who are hypersensitive about their health, about their bodies, who go on crazy, liquid diets and are always obsessed with how they look and seeking immortality, physical immortality, through diet and exercise; those people are practicing a kind of gluttony, too. It is too much.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, nobody thinks about food so much as the person who is trying to diet, or who is on a crazy diet, and they will talk about food more than those who aren't because they are obsessed with it. So again, how do we get a handle on this and have a more proper appreciation? You mentioned Paul in Philippians, but also in Titus, where he talks a lot about self control. At one point, Paul says, "The grace of God teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and Godly lives in this present age." That self control over our appetites, and to keep the appetites – which themselves are a good thing – again, to desire good food and drink is a gift of the Lord; it is the way God made us. God put Adam and Eve in a garden full of good food, we are told; and that is right from the beginning; but how do we have a properly

ordered appetite toward the things we take in?

DAVE BAST

The New Testament talks a great deal, really, about self control. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit; it is the last one mentioned in Galatians 5:23. You referred to the Titus verse, Titus 2:12, about how grace teaches us how to say, “No.” That is self control. Or there is a passage in I Corinthians 9, where Paul compares himself to an athlete, like a runner in a race:

^{24b}Run that you may obtain the prize. ²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. We need to do that by analogy. They do it for a reward that fades away, but we have an eternal prize.

A fruit of the Spirit, an important challenge to us as Christians, a part of our discipleship, but the question is, how?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it also involves trust, and nurturing that trust in God, that God will provide. As Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount: God knows you need to eat. It is not a sin to want to eat. It is not a sin to eat. God knows what you need. He feeds the birds of the air, He will feed you. God will take great delight in feeding you and in seeing you enjoy it, but trust that God will be the one to provide.

It is like manna in the desert; the one thing they could not collect, they could not keep overnight was manna, because you just had to trust that God would give it again the next day. They would have to live that way; day by day by day relying on God, and that is a wonderful discipline to have.

DAVE BAST

That is great, and I believe the Bible and I accept all of this, but I still struggle with the question, how? I pray for self control all the time, and it does not seem like I have been given it at this point yet in my life. It is still very hard to say no when you are standing in front of the refrigerator or when you are in the mall and you are looking at that cool thing that you think will make you feel good, and yet you know, “Well, I really shouldn’t just buy it. My life does not consist in the abundance of possessions,” as Jesus says. How about something that you have asked for, you’ve striven for, but you still have not attained; what is going wrong? Are we going about this in the wrong way or is there some secret?

SCOTT HOEZEE

One of the things I like about Paul in the New Testament is that he is often realistic, and the scriptures are often realistic, and even how God dealt with Israel in the Old Testament; it was often a series of small things. If you think about self control you think about big things; but maybe it is just the little practices day by day that build this up. You just stop yourself when you are reaching into the cupboard for that bag of Fritos. “Do I need this? No, I don’t.” And so, this time, it is a little thing and it just – “I’ll have some Fritos later, perhaps, but not now. I am just going to say, ‘No.’ I am just going to slow down.” Or you say to yourself, “I am just going to do my best. I am going try it all week and see how it goes. I will not eat while doing something else. I am not going to eat at my desk while I am working. I am not going to eat while I am watching TV. I am not going to eat while I am driving a car. I am just going to do these little things, one thing at a time, to see if greater mindfulness will come to me. If just a little self control here or there does not build into something bigger.”

I think a lot of writers about spiritual disciplines have talked about that. It is like exercises; you do not start lifting a 150-pound barbell, you start with the 15-pound one and then you build up. Maybe that is how to do it.

DAVE BAST

But, really; is there anything specifically Christian about this? This just sounds like ordinary, common sense advice. It is willpower. It is, “Here, try this trick or that trick.” Where does this idea of the Spirit come in or the idea that it is a fruit that comes out of our relationship with God? Is there something more to be said if we are Christians than just the old tag: Just say no. Exercise your willpower. Well, let’s explore that a little bit more in just a minute.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork in our seven deadly sins series today on the sin of gluttony, and we have been saying, Dave, that the problem with many of these seven deadly sins is that it takes what is a good gift of God's creation and ruins it. There is a reason why, for all the passages in the Bible that say, "Don't do this," there are also some passages that say, "Wait a minute; don't go too far." One from I Timothy 4:3-5, where Paul writes, talking about some false teachers that Timothy needed to worry about and to combat in his own church community, Paul says:

³"They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good; nothing is to be rejected provided it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer."

You were asking me a moment ago, what makes this specifically spiritual? How is this self control stuff different from a 12-step program or secular advice from a therapist or a sociologist? Paul says it is; especially when you bathe it all with prayer and you know you are relying on God's word and God's power in your life. Maybe that is part of what makes it specifically spiritual.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I think so. I think this is the whole approach, really. It is not just a matter of saying, "No." It is not just a matter of willpower. You can always find people who will tell you to abstain from this or they forbid that. Paul talks about forbidding marriage, which is rather interesting in view of what some Christian traditions have done with respect to pastors, for example; or those who have said: No, you cannot have this, that, or the other thing; you have to do fasting, or you cannot have alcohol, or you cannot have meat, or whatever the case may be. And Paul clearly says, "Hey, that is not the way of Christ. That is a human tradition." And maybe for individuals, if you want to come up with a rule like that, fine, but God has created all things and they are all good. Everything God has made is good and nothing is out of bounds. It is like Jesus said when Mark adds the comment: He declared all foods clean, when Jesus said this. "It is not what comes into a person that defiles them. It is what is already inside there."

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is why, in terms of Paul's advice to Timothy here: Affirm the creation. Celebrate what is good. Jesus did that. Apparently, Jesus liked dinner parties enough that with some credibility His critics were able to label Jesus a glutton and a winebibber. Jesus was seen at parties often enough that they thought, "Well, He is an over-indulger." No, but He was receiving with gratitude the good gifts of His own creation, and of His Father, because He knew that there is nothing wrong with this by itself if you, with prayer and in reliance on God's word, can be a grateful person.

One of things we have been talking about is some practical ideas. How can you become a grateful person in a society especially, again, here in the West, not in other parts of the world, but here in the West, where we are so clotted with good things, that we just never think to give thanks; how can we do that more?

DAVE BAST

If you have a problem with overeating, let's say, how about trying this: Do not ever eat anything without praying first and giving thanks for it. Just stop that little bit, whether it is a snack that you grab out of the cupboard on the way through, or a full-blown feast that you are sitting down to on Thanksgiving Day with your family; do not ever put anything in your mouth without stopping and pausing first and saying, "Can I give thanks to God for this?" And that will also help us, then, to reflect on what we are about to do. Do I really need this now? Do I really want this now?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that is an outstanding suggestion and it is an excellent suggestion, and it is harder than it sounds, too, because I have tried that; I have done that in my life, and then for a season I will be pretty good. I will not eat a Tootsie-Roll without saying, "Thank you, God, for this gift." And then, all of a sudden, you get away from it. All of a sudden, you are on your 19th potato chip and it is like, "Oh, I didn't pause there." So, it is difficult when we are surrounded by food, but it is an excellent thing to nurture gratitude and it will slow you down,

but that is a good thing, right? Stopping to pray slows you down.

We were talking earlier about how gluttony is not just over-eating, but it can be eating with too much fuss, insisting that the only food you will eat is four-star cuisine that costs a ton of money are really high-end, white tablecloth restaurants; that is a problem. As is just shoving french fries and chicken nuggets in your mouth from the fast-food place without thinking. So, what can you do? Well, it depends where you are. If you are somebody who will only eat the best-of-best food, then you need to learn how to eat a hotdog with sauerkraut smothered all over it and give thanks to God for that; and if you are somebody who only ever shoves hotdogs and sauerkraut in your mouth, and in large portions at that, you need to learn to have a very simple salad, nicely put together by somebody who knows what they are doing, and give thanks for that, and slow yourself down. So, depending where you are on the spectrum, you might need to purposely do some exercises to break you out.

DAVE BAST

Here is another suggestion. There are traditional spiritual disciplines, and those have always been held to be real wisdom, and one of them is fasting. Fasting does not necessarily mean going for days and days without food. What it means is, lighten up; maybe skip a meal, maybe eat less at your regular meal intentionally, and do that in a spirit of discipline, but also a spirit of prayer that says, “God, I want You to remind me, as You did with Jesus in the wilderness when He fasted, that we do not live by bread alone. We do not live for food. We enjoy it, we take the pleasure from You, but we really live on Your word and on the life that You give us through Your Spirit.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

People like Richard Foster and others who have written about these spiritual disciplines will also say when you fast devote some of time you would have devoted to eating to praying instead. You might be surprised how much more praying you do. You realize how much time we spend eating every day; but if you pray instead, then not only does that, again, build up your gratitude, center you on God, but it can help reorient your thinking.

DAVE BAST

One more thing; maybe this is the last that we have time for. Cultivate the faith that Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount, when He tells us, “Don’t be so fussy.” You remember that great passage, Scott, where He says, “Look at the birds of the air; look at the flowers of the field. They are not obsessed about where their food is going to come from or where their clothing is or how they look; but your heavenly Father takes care of them, and you need to be aware that He will take care of you as well.” We cultivate that spirit of dependence, and gratitude goes hand in hand with that, where we are trusting God to give us what we need in order to live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is living by faith and living by trust. I like the line in the Sermon on the Mount, including that part, Dave, you were just talking about, but Jesus does it elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount, where He will point to the lilies of the field, He will point to the birds of the air; which we know are kind of clueless; they really do not know... But again and again, Jesus comes back to the line: If I take care of them, how much more won’t I take care of you? That is that attitude of trust, again, with the Israelites in the wilderness with manna new every morning: Hey, look. I am taking care of the donkeys in the field and the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. If I am doing that for them, who cannot even love Me back – you can – how much more won’t I take care of you?

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for listening to Groundwork today and joining our conversation. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit us at groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like us to address on our next Groundwork program.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/gluttony>

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