

“SEVEN SERIOUS SINS: GLUTTONY.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Corinthians 11:20-22, 27-34

Introduction.

Lent is a penitential season when some Christians take stock of their spiritual lives.

Think about how a doctor asks us questions about our diet, what we eat and drink, habits like smoking, caffeine and alcohol intake, do we exercise.

We don't mind him asking too much, it's a bit personal but we know he is asking because he cares about our health and he is probing to find areas of concern and suggest steps to improve.

But what about when the pastor asks about our spiritual health, what if he raised a series of seven serious spiritual concerns, how would we respond to that kind of probing?

My desire in our series on seven serious sins is our spiritual health and well-being. We can't grow in love and faith and fruitfulness when there are obstacles and hurdles in the way. So we are knocking down seven of those this Lent.

Are we humble and open to the sanctifying work of the Spirit to open our eyes and expose the iniquity in our hearts. My prayer this Lent is this will be for us a path to forgiveness and freedom and joy.

Foodies in Corinth.

There were problems in the church in Corinth, it was full of sinners who were sinning. Paul was a good and faithful pastor who addressed sin. They had a gluttony problem that was damaging their relationships with each other and with God. Have you considered how food can lead us into sin with God and each other?

What were they doing? Some of them were impatient and selfish, they are eating before everyone else and they were not saving any or sharing any with those who come later. They had a me-first or me-only attitude. Like pride, it was a sin of thinking only of self.

Church potlucks and picnics are great feasts, to be enjoyed, but they can be occasions for sin. A meal that was meant to symbolize brotherly love and affection, turned into a sinful expression of over-indulgence, impatience and selfishness, done in the name of Christ. By treating everyone else in an unworthy manner they were treating Christ and His table in an unworthy manner.

Think of how food can damage our relationships and come between us and a brother. It can cause us to be selfish and self-centered. It can cause us to neglect or ignore the needs of others. It's scary to consider what an appetite like hunger can compel us to do or not do and how quickly it can lead us into sin.

How do we make food and eating into an idol?

What we are not talking about?

First, most of us have some stereotypes or misconceptions of what gluttony is. It is easy to fall into judgmentalism and think anyone who is over weight is a glutton, but that's not true. There are all kinds of conditions and reasons for people weighing too much or too little.

Gluttony can't just be measured with a bathroom scale or a tape measure. Your belly can be a god, no matter how big or small it is. Gluttons come in all shapes and sizes. All of us are gluttons to one degree or another. I am, but my metabolism has hidden it from the world and from me. It's a heart issue more than a weight issues.

Second, we are not talking about over doing it at Thanksgiving or Christmas. The Bible is overwhelmingly positive about food. There are countless references to feasts. God instituted several feasts for Israel to be observed annually.

Jesus started His ministry with a feast at a wedding and ended His ministry with a Passover meal in the upper room. Jesus enjoyed food and drink enough to be accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. He started a great parable about what the kingdom of God is like, saying, "A man gave a feast and invited his friends."

I Timothy 4:3-4 God created [food] to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good.

Give thanks for good food, for mouths and taste buds to savor and enjoy good food, and for cooks who prepare good food. These are all gifts to be enjoyed and you can enjoy them without sinning.

Third, gluttony doesn't just involve food and drink. It can be toys, TV, shopping, hobbies, entertainment, sex, anything you can do to excess. Just as lust isn't just about sex, and greed isn't just about money, so gluttony isn't just about food or drink. We can over-consume lots of things. But this morning we will mainly focus on how our bellies become our god.

What are we talking about?

The word gluttony means to gulp down or swallow, to over-indulge and over-consume. But gluttony isn't just over-indulgence. As pride is a pre-occupation with self, gluttony is a pre-occupation with food, giving food too much attention.

It is demanding or expecting more pleasure from something than it was meant to give. Frederick Buechner calls a glutton “one who raids the icebox for a cure for spiritual malnutrition.”

Gluttony is disordered hunger, disordered cravings or desires. It's using God's gifts of food and drink in a way that dulls us or distracts us from God and spiritual realities.

When Satan tempted Adam and Eve through the sin of pride and seeking to be like God, he used food as a gateway. Satan tried the same gateway sin to tempt the second Adam, Christ.

Matthew 4:2-3 After fasting forty days and forty nights [in the wilderness], he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

The temptation for Adam and Jesus wasn't to eat too much, it was to make food too important.

Like Esau, gluttony is making food too important. Esau gave up the most important thing in his life for a bowl of stew. This sin can so enslave us we give up the most important things for it.

The key term is "too much." Signs of gluttony are too soon, too eagerly, too quickly. Some is good, more is better, too much is just right.

Gluttony is certainly an American sin. The quantity and quality of food available to us and the convenience and ease with which it is so readily available to us makes gluttony too easy.

America invented fast food, all-you-can-eat buffets, super sizing and Big Gulps. There is an entire Food Channel of cable. There are over 5.5 billion food related pins on Pinterest and God only knows how many food selfies on Facebook. Americans spend \$50 billion a year dieting.

But that's America. How has this idol and sin taken root in our hearts? Consider two ways.

Comfort food. Where do we turn when life gets hard, things go sour, we are depressed? What is your go to comfort food?

Pizza, mac and cheese, ice cream, chocolate, chicken pot pie, mom's meat loaf, cheeseburger and fries, sweet cereal. Is it just me or is it getting hungry in here?

What is your only comfort in life and in death? If the answer includes the word food, you may be in the sin of gluttony. I wrote part of this sermon eating almond M&Ms. That's my go to comfort food.

This is making food like a drug, something that is meant to make us feel good. We are looking to get something from food that God didn't intend, in fact something we are to get from God.

Cool food. Others use food to be cool. We impress people with what we serve or eat. And I am not just talking sushi, caviar and escargot.

I am ashamed to admit I have allowed words to be spoken in my house that would have been unthinkable ten years ago. Four letter words like tofu, kale, feta. And bigger bad words like risotto, quinoa, and couscous.

There is a whole new realm people obsessing over certain foods and diets and drinks called foodies. Foodies are the new glutton, the acceptable word for someone who cares about and enjoys food too much. The only thing foodies like more than eating is talking about eating. They care way too much.

The sin of gluttony can come out in what we don't eat and why. The person with the excessive discriminating palate has made food just as much an idol as the one who overindulges. To hear some vegetarians and vegans talk words like beef or pork are hate speech.

Have we become food or drink snobs, only the highest quality, only organic, only free range, only fancy coffees? Have we refined our palate to the point of pride, snobbery, looking down on others, thinking ourselves better, being critical of other people's food habits?

Have you noticed how some people talk about alcohol, they love to go on and on about where they drink, the newest and coolest micro-breweries, what they drink, how they have advanced beyond watered down American beer to pale ales and oatmeal stouts or why they think Guinness is better than Heineken. And don't even think about getting the wine crowd going, you will be there all night.

Are our obsessions, diets, constant calorie counting, and other food fetishes part of our idolatry of food? Do we slam down our meal without any thought to how food is a good gift from God, to be received with gratitude?

Gluttony test.

Food is meant to be enjoyed, not worshipped. Is your belly your god (Philippians 3:19)? Consider these questions as a spiritual health test.

How much do you spend on food and on eating out?

Do you regularly eat to the point of discomfort? Do you feel guilty?

Do you wake up thinking about food and eating out?

How often do you post on social networks about food?

Do you use food to try to make you feel better about life?

Do you eat when you are depressed or lonely or anxious or bored?

Do you keep stashes of food at home or at work or in your car?

Do you eat between meals, lots of snacks?

Do you have a big sweet tooth and overdo it on desserts or chocolate?

Do you buy feel-good junk at the grocery?

How difficult is it for you to give something up or do without it?
Is our behavior or attitude ruled by our appetite?

We can't apply the gospel to sin we don't know about or don't think we have?

How can we starve the sin of gluttony?

Clearly it's not easy. Just think about how hard it is for us to lose weight. It's a battle most of us have trouble winning. Food has a grip on us.

From whence cometh our help? Our help comes from the Lord. We need to be clear about this. We have all tried will power and we really don't have any. We need outside help to put food in its place and keep it in its place.

First, we need to be honest about our sin and not make excuses or shift the blame. Repentance makes us who are unworthy, worthy. Repentance is the path to recovery.

Second, we need to look to Jesus as our example and help. Jesus overcame temptation by the power of God and Scripture. The same power that raised Him from the dead is ours through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. His power is ours to overcome sin, including the sin of gluttony. We must ask daily help to conquer these daily desires.

Jesus refused to let food define Him or be His highest priority or even to distract Him from His purpose and mission in life. Even when He was starving, He kept His own desires in check and exercised self-control and delayed gratification.

Self-control and discipline are the path out of bondage and to freedom. Gluttony is being bound by food. Self-control is freedom from the slavery of food. Self-control is not will power, it is the gift and grace of the Holy Spirit in us, it is God's work in us. Seek it.

I am sure most of you say some kind of prayer before your meals. And I imagine those prayers can become a bit routine or rote. I encourage you this week to turn those prayers into true prayers of thanksgiving for the gifts God has given us, food, taste, those who prepare it, the money to buy it. And ask God to enable you and your family to receive and eat your food to the glory of God, and to open your eyes to where there is sin and to starve it.

Giving thanks before a meal if thoughtfully done can give us proper perspective on the food we are about to receive and keep our appetites in check. If we see food as a gift from God we may be less inclined to let it become a god.

Third, don't be afraid of fasting. It is a spiritual discipline, a gift that if used properly can minister to our souls and help train us in self-control and self-discipline. Fasting reveals what controls us and how strongly. Fasting forces us to push food away, to create some space for our soul to be released from its bondage to earthly things. Limiting physical pleasures awakens spiritual desires.

Finally, we need to cultivate a hunger and thirst for eternal pleasures and treasures. The one place where you cannot over-indulge is in spiritual food.

Feast on Jesus and on the Word of God, the true bread of heaven. We must learn to live not by bread alone but by the Word of God.

Psalm 34:8 Taste and see that the Lord is good.

I Peter 2:2 Desire the sincere spiritual milk of the word.

John 6:35 I am the bread of life. Come to me and you will not hunger.

The more we cultivate a spiritual hunger the more physical hunger will lose its power over us. Do you believe God is better than bread, that God is better than a full stomach?

Lord's Supper, Lord's Table.

Most of life's important moments are marked and celebrated with food and drink, birthdays, anniversaries, weddings and funerals, holidays and family gatherings. Our eating and drinking are not just to satisfy our physical needs, they nourish us emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

It is significant that Jesus marked the most important moment of His life on earth with food and drink. We feast to celebrate His life, death and resurrection, His victory over sin and death. This food stands for what Jesus was all about and what He came to do.

Scripture tells us to prepare to receive this food. In coming to this table God says, first examine yourself to see if there be any sinful attitude or way in you. Judge yourself before God is forced to. Don't be apathetic, don't delude yourself. Ask God to show you, invite His loving discipline and correction so we can walk in His ways and in His grace.

This table says our hope and help is in the Lord, we need Him in us to help us overcome the sin and old nature in us. The truth is without Jesus, without the living bread and living water, we would starve to death.

I am leading us in this series to fight for our joy, to fix our eyes on Jesus and on His joy that is set before us, a joy that He fought for on the cross and secured in His resurrection.

Do we see the great grace and gift that is given to us in this table, and in some way, in every table? That is why we pause to say grace, to receive what is given with grace and not to our condemnation.

I Corinthians 10:31 Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

May God grant us the grace to eat and drink to the glory of God, and may we find and receive that grace as we feast on Him and feast together with Him.