To Hell on a Cream Puff: The Deadly Sin of Gluttony
Seven Deadly Sins #2
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In August of 2000 the “Golf Plus” section of *Sports Illustrated* included an article on a golf tournament called “The Fatty Open.” It’s like many golf tournaments in that there are prizes for certain categories. But while most tournaments have a designated hole in which the closest tee shot to the pin wins an award, The Fatty Open has an award for landing your tee shot closest to the buffet table at the third hole—a buffet table filled with hamburgers. Most golf tournaments don’t have a prize for the heaviest foursome. But the Fatty Open does (1520 pounds in 2000). And The Fatty Open is surely the only golf tournament in the world in which an award is given for the golfer with the highest blood pressure—a 10-pound stick of pepperoni and a George Foreman grill. It is the only golf tournament that awards a 50-pound stick of butter as a prize. You can see why *Sports Illustrated* chose to do the story, and, as you might expect, the writer played it for a few yuks, portraying the contestants as fun-loving, jolly, regular guys.

One can only imagine the outrage which would have met the article had it been written about a golf tournament called “The Alcoholics Open” in which chronic overdrinkers played in a golf tournament which boasted an open bar at the third hole and in which the contestant with the most diseased liver won a case of Jim Beam. The letters to the editor would have been angry and numerous.

But I’m guessing that SI didn’t get too many angry letters about the story on The Fatty Open. After all, gluttony is the most acceptable, the cutest, the cuddliest of the so-called “deadly sins.”

We live in a super-sized nation, a world in which king-size candy bars look normal, while what used to be normal-size candy bars look bite-sized, a society which not only hosts the world championships for eating hot dogs, but even televises it—on ESPN, which is ostensibly a network for *sports*, for *athletics!* Televise homosexuals flaunting their homosexuality by marching downtown Phoenix, and we’re appalled. Televise gluttons swallowing hot dogs in a manner that resembles someone shoving timber into a wood chipper—that’s entertainment!

For people who have grown up in such a world, the very notion that such a sin even exists—much less that it could possibly be classified by anyone as “deadly”, as posing a serious threat to our souls—well, that just seems to smack of the artificial strictness of Puritanism.

But make no mistake about it. Gluttony is indeed a sin, and a number of Bible passages prove it. Two of the proverbs speak to it. The first says, “He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.” (Proverbs 28:7) The second is even more clear, more commanding, saying, “Do not join those who drink too much wine [and perhaps here it is worth pointing out that drunkenness is nothing other than gluttony in liquid form] or gorge themselves on meat…” (Proverbs 23:20)

For some people gluttony is an occasional sin, reserved only for special occasions. Each year they plan to and look forward to eating to the point of discomfort on Thanksgiving. Or each New Year’s Eve they plan to wake up the next morning on someone’s floor in a puddle of their own drool.

Others indulge in gluttony a bit more often. Friday nights are spent getting to know the Captain quite well—Captain Morgan, that is. Once a week they take the “all-you-can-eat” sign on the buffet quite literally.
For still others, it threatens to overtake their life. Overeating or overdrinking is a daily thing, and their bodies suffer severely as a result of their gluttony.

And that’s one of the big problems with gluttony, isn’t it—that it harms our bodies—bodies that are not ours to do with and to care for—or abuse—as we wish, bodies which are on loan to us from God.

Imagine if a friend had left you the keys to their home and told you to take care of it, and you trashed the place while you were gone—repeatedly attempting to shove things down the garbage disposal and flush things down the toilet—things that weren’t good for them—simply because you were too lazy to look for a garbage can. Suppose that the pipes became so clogged up that an expensive plumber had to bring in his roto-rooter and go through a 6-hour procedure to fix it. Your friend would be irate at you for the way you treated his home.

And yet isn’t that the way we often treat the bodies that God has loaned to us by our gluttonous choices of food and drink—both in the amount and also in the type of food and drink? We take better care of our cars than of our bodies! Some people will only put a certain octane of gas in their cars. Others will only put a certain brand of gas in their cars. And none of us would think of putting anything other than gasoline into our fuel tanks. But anything and everything goes into our bodies without a second thought!

So where do you fall into all of this? Before we go any further, let me make something very clear: Not all overweight people are gluttons, and not all gluttons are overweight. Some of the biggest gluttons may be those who can get away with routinely overeating, those whose metabolisms make other people jealous, those who can eat a bag of Doritos every day—and yet never gain an ounce.

So where do you fall into all of this? Are your encounters with vegetables typically limited to the relish you put on your hot dogs? Is the closest you come to fruit when you put an olive in your martini? You might be inclined to respond to that question with a question of your own—“Where is the line? When does eating and drinking move from simple, God-pleasing enjoyment of his blessings to being an abuse of his blessings, to being gluttony?” I can’t answer that question specifically for you, but that line is probably crossed more than we would think.

Because understand this: The sin of gluttony isn’t merely a Fifth Commandment issue. That is, it’s not merely an issue of how we take care of—or slowly murder—the bodies that God has given to us. It’s also a First Commandment issue.

Let me explain what I mean by beginning with a question: “Why gluttony?” Why do people drink too much? Why do we eat too much? The answer people commonly give is, “I just like the clean, crisp taste of Miller Lite” or “I just can’t resist ice cream.” But, while I don’t doubt that such things taste good to many people, I believe there’s something more to it than that.

The overuse of Miller Lite and the overuse of ice cream doesn’t come merely because we’re looking for great taste. It sometimes comes when we are looking for the same thing as the writer of Ecclesiastes. In the opening chapters of his book he states that he made it his goal to research pleasure, to look for lasting pleasure—and therefore he pursued such pleasure. He mentions that he tried cheering himself with wine (2:3), and I don’t doubt that he also ate not only the choicest foods, but plenty of them.

What happened? In the end he had to admit that he still hadn’t found what he was looking for. What was he looking for? He was looking for lasting happiness, lasting peace, lasting satisfaction for his soul.
You’ve all heard the term “comfort food.” It implies, doesn’t it, that food is able to provide something more than sustenance and a bit of momentary good taste? Doesn’t it seem to imply that food can provide something more?

So really, why do we eat too much or drink too much? Very often it’s because we’re searching for happiness, thinking that if we just eat or drink enough, we’ll be satisfied and happy—or at least not so sad.

But when you attempt to satisfy your stomach, you’ll find that you can’t get satisfaction for your soul. In the end, it leaves you feeling even less satisfied than you were before because it leaves you further from God than you were before.

Adam and Eve thought that eating the fruit—perhaps the first sin of gluttony—would leave them satisfied. Instead, it distanced them from God, left them feeling ashamed and unsatisfied.

Our gluttony may come from how much we eat or drink, but it also comes from **why** we eat and drink. The line between ordinary eating and drinking and the sin of gluttony is not merely crossed in the liver or the waistline, but also in the soul—because at times we eat and drink to find the comfort and contentment and/or the loss of inhibition that ought to come instead from giving ourselves over to, as the Explanation to the First Commandment says, fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things. There’s something very sad about that, and there’s something very damnable about that.

I don’t know what specific punishments await gluttons in Hell—tradition says that gluttons are destined to spend eternity being forced to eat rats, toads and snakes—but I do know that there will be no comfort food—or even any comfort whatsoever—in Hell. It’s no wonder, then, that one of the Proverbs tells us, “Put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony.” (23:2). Better that than an eternity in hell!

Of course it’s too late for us gluttonous overeaters and gluttonous drunkards—whether our gluttony has been of the habitual, the merely regular, or just the occasional sort. We’ve committed the deadly sin of gluttony, and now death in Hell awaits us.

Thank God then that Jesus was not a glutton. Don’t get me wrong—he wasn’t someone who went to the opposite extreme and acted as though food and drink were evil. No, throughout the Bible we see Jesus attending meals—banquets, even. One would imagine that he sampled the wide variety of foods that were available to him. I rather suspect that he ate from the fruit and veggie tray—and also from the pizza tray.

In fact, because Jesus seemed to be someone who enjoyed food, drink, and banquets, some even accused him of gluttony. Jesus said, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard…” (Matthew 11:19).

But be assured that Jesus never committed the sin of gluttony, never committed the sin of listening to his stomach more than his God. Satan had used food to get Adam and Eve to sin, so he tried to use food to get Jesus to sin, coming to Jesus in the wilderness after he had been without food for 40 days and saying to him, “Tell these stones to become bread.” (Matthew 4:3)

But even there, even as his stomach must have been positively bellowing at him to satisfy it, he knew that there was something more important, something more satisfying to his soul, and that was doing God’s will. Therefore he ignored the temptation of the devil and ignored the command of his stomach.

How did he do it? He focused on something far more satisfying, something far sweeter to his soul—doing the will of God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus and his disciples are out walking, and it’s around noon—time to eat—especially if you’ve been out walking for much of the morning. His disciples go to get something to eat while Jesus stays behind
and ends up talking with a Samaritan woman about spiritual matters such as forgiveness and the promised Savior. When his disciples return, they urge him to eat, but Jesus replies to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” (John 4:32). The disciples, knowing how hungry they had been and how satisfying they were finding the food they had purchased, look at each other, puzzled, and finally conclude that Jesus must have already eaten. Jesus responds by saying, “My work is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34)

Speaking with that Samaritan woman, sharing God’s Word with her—that was more satisfying to Jesus’ soul than any Double Whopper with cheese. The growling of his stomach had receded to a faint whisper when compared with the screaming joy of doing the will of his Father, of pleasing his Father in heaven.

But Jesus still had to finish that work. So it was that on Good Friday our sins of gluttony became very deadly sins indeed—deadly for Jesus, who suffered and died as a payment for those sins. The proof of the payment is his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

I pray that that is satisfying news to you—that it fills you in a way that no cream puff ever could. I pray that it satisfies the hunger in your soul. I pray that it leads you to do as Paul commanded the Ephesians when he wrote, “Do not get drunk on wine...Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18).

Yes, indeed, be filled with the Spirit and be filled with the Word of God that he brings. Listen to God’s gracious invitation: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (Isaiah 55:1,2) May your soul find deep and lasting satisfaction in the knowledge that your “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6) and your yearning for salvation has been filled by Jesus.

Come and be filled with that “richest of fare” each Sunday morning at 9:00. Come also and be filled at Bible class at 10:30. Don’t worry—you won’t get too much of it and end up with a stomachache of the soul. You’ll never find yourself staring at an empty container of God’s Word and regretting that you ate so much.

And may you also make a more conscious effort to practice temperance, to view eating and drinking in their proper perspective. I’m not saying that you ought to view them as something evil, nor am I saying that if you’re going to eat, your diet may only consist of roots and berries. Food—all kinds of food—is a blessings of God. But may you be watchful that you are not abusing these blessings—and that the blessings do not replace the Blesser in your heart. Learn to deny your stomach. Learn to ask yourself if you are eating and drinking in order to find spiritual satisfaction that you ought find instead in Christ.

And as you do that, may you look forward—forward to another feast. At times in the Bible, Heaven is spoken of as a banquet (Matthew 22; Luke 14). There we will be eternally, perfectly satisfied as we rest forever in God’s presence. Amen.