

## How Can I Conquer Gluttony?

There are a lot of reasons for obesity in our culture. It's not just that we eat a lot of bad food. We're also pretty inactive and don't do a lot of walking, running, biking, etc. Oftentimes obesity issues are connected as much to activity issues as they are to what goes into our mouths. Muscles are designed to burn food, but if they aren't being used then any amount of food is going to result in obesity.

But "gluttony" is a better word to use in this context rather than "obesity," because overeating is where the problem is, not how much we weigh. There are all kinds of reasons why a person might weight too much or too little that is not a result of gluttony.

Gluttony is having a craving for food that conquers you.

The text of Scripture that holds out the challenge to me on this issue is 1 Corinthians 6:12 where Paul says—specifically in regard to food and drink—that he will not be enslaved by anything. He is saying, "I have one master, Jesus Christ, and I don't want any other master." Then in 9:27 he talks about pummeling his body: "I pummel my body lest I be disqualified."

I think we need to recover a large appreciation for the biblical disciplines of self-denial and fasting. That is the discipline side of this issue: "I will not be enslaved by anything," "I pommel myself," and "I take up my cross daily." I think we should esteem, extol, and cherish the biblical teaching that the Christian life is one of confronting our cravings and saying no to them.

But easier said than done, right?

So how do you fight the battle? I think it must be fought mainly not with the word "No" but with an alternative "Yes."

It is very interesting to me that there are so many food and taste analogies in the Bible for God himself:

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

(1 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."

(Isaiah 55:1-2) "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food."

The implication here is that if we give ourselves to being satisfied with spiritual bread, wine, and milk, then physical hunger will lose its supreme power.

The main way to fight cravings that we don't want is to experience higher cravings and have them master us.

Here's where the rubber meets the road. Say you're sitting down at the table, and you're very hungry. You know that if you give yourself free reign then you'll eat two or three helpings of everything, get up stuffed, gain weight, and feel guilty. Why are we tempted to do that?

One very practical reason is that we are bored, and nothing is happening after supper that is more exciting than supper. Therefore staying at this table and eating feels really good, whereas leaving the table to do whatever is next on our agenda feels boring. Very practically then, I would plan something after supper that you want to do. It can certainly be something spiritual, but it can also be a type of exercise or a visit with a friend.

A lot of gluttony is born of boredom. Life is not satisfying or stimulating, relationships feel empty, and work is boring, but food is always there and tastes so good.

So we need to cultivate a range of appetites for great and good things, things like good literature, people's fellowship, reading the Bible, nature, work, etc. Discover these other appetites so that things other than food can satisfy you. Then pray earnestly and cultivate and nurture these satisfactions.