

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Galatians 5:1, 16-26, 6:1-2
“Gluttony: Full Belly, Empty Heart”

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(5th Sunday In Lent)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website: www.msumc1.org

“Following Christ From City Center!”

GALATIANS 5:1, 16-26, 6:1-2
"GLUTTONY: FULLY BELLY, EMPTY HEART"

5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; **Whole Of Galatians, Exert Cooperative Effort To Stay Free In Christ's Gift**
stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. **3:13, 4:4-5, Possible To Go Back To Bondage**
Introduced Into A New Realm, 2nd Baptismal Vow

1) v.16 TWO COMMANDS: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE. **If Follow Spirit, Flesh Will Not Prevail**

16 + But I say, **WALK BY THE SPIRIT**, **Walk = Lifestyle, Daily Conduct, Positive, Ps. 1:1-2**
- and do not (or, you will not) *gratify* the desire of the flesh (i.e. ones sinful nature). **Principle Of Displacement**
Flesh (Gk. sarx) = Good But Fallen Human Being Twisted By Sin/Evil/Death

2) v.17 THE WAR WITHIN: BATTLE OF FLESH AND SPIRIT. **2 Powers Compete**

17 For the **desires of the flesh** (i.e. our fallen nature) **Not Body But Fallen Nature, Not Synonymous**
are against the spirit, **Holy Spirit = New Nature, Battleground Within Each Believer**
and the desires of the spirit **Two Different Competing Realms Of Power/ Spiritual Influence In Bodies**
are against the flesh; **Holy Spirit Provides Clear Direction In A War Zone**
Your Will Is Not Free On Its Own: Frustration

For these are opposed to one another,
to prevent you from doing what you would. **Not Do What I Want**
Not Virtues And Vices, 2 Ways Of Life, Evidences Of Each

3) v.18 FREEDOM: NOT UNDER THE LAW. **Not Fight Directly, Spirit Initiates**

18 But if you are *led* by the Spirit, **Active Person: The Holy Spirit As Divine GPS, Clarity**
you are not under **the law.** **New Means Of Motivation, 3:23-25, 4:4-5, Rom. 6:14, 8:14**
Internal Guidance Vs. External Restraint

4) vv.19-21a VICE LIST: THE WORKS OF THE FLESH, 4 GROUPS.

19 Now the works of the flesh are plain: **Obvious, Look Around! Rom. 13:12**
1-3 a (sexual) immorality, impurity, licentiousness (debauchery), **3 Sexual Sins, 2 Cor. 12:21 (1)**
Mk. 7:21-22, Rom. 1:29-31, 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 2 Cor. 12:20
20 4-5 b idolatry, sorcery (witchcraft), **False Worship, Occult/Magical Practices (2)**
6-13 c enmity (hatred), strife (discord), jealousy, anger (fits of rage), **Intra/Inter-Personal (3)**
8 Of 15 Are Communal
1 Cor. 3:3, Strife
14-15+ d drunkenness, carousing (orgies, excessive feasting), and the like. **Excess/Indulgence (4)**
All Are About Self At Expense Of Loyalty And The Neighbor

5) v.21b ULTIMATE WARNING OF EXCLUSION. **Exhortations**

I warn you, as I warned you before, **Behaviors That Activate Wrath**
that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. **Warning**
Continual Action, Unrepentant Habit, Bad/Evil Character

4') vv.22-23a VIRTUE LIST: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (9) **Takes Time**

22 1-3 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **These Grow Together In Community**
23 4-6 patience, kindness, goodness, **Single Fruit: Multiple Evidences**
7-9 faithfulness, gentleness, **self-control** (*egkrateia*, especially regarding sexuality);
Contrast With Gifts, 1 Cor. 12:4-31

3') v.23b FREEDOM: NO OPPOSING LAW. **Law Not Produce Fruit**

against such there is no **law.** **Dig At His Opponents! This Is The Character God Desires**
Free From Law But Not Opposed To The Law Of God

2') v.24 THE WAR ENDED: THE FLESH CRUCIFIED.

24 And those who belong to Jesus Christ **We Are His Property/Prize, New Identity/Power, 2:19-20**
have crucified the **flesh** with its passions and **desires.** **Put Old Habits To Death/Replacement**

1') vv.25-26 INDICATIVE AND TWO IMPERATIVES: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE.

25 + If (since) we live by the Spirit, **New Life In Christ Is Already Ours**
let us also **WALK BY THE SPIRIT.** **Keep in step with the Spirit! Ethical Imperative: Active, Positive Obedience**

26 - Let us have no conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another. **vv.19-21a, Summary: Imperative (3x)**
Moral Skill Is Not Automatic Or Magical

6:1 Brethren (and sisteren!), if a man (woman) is overtaken in any trespass, **Crossing A Boundary**
you who are spiritual should restore him (her) in a spirit of gentleness. **Wesley, "Watch over one another in love."**

6:2 Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. **vv.25-26 Are A Biblical Basis For Support Groups**
Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. **Put Your Shoulder Under Someone Else's Pain**

A BEGINNING ANALYSIS OF THE DEADLY SIN OF GLUTTONY & EXCESS

CATEGORY	GLUTTONY
Bodily Location	Throat, Belly
Synonyms	Excess, Excessive desire for anything, Asking of something more than it can deliver
Varieties Of Gluttony: <i>F.R.E.S.H</i>	Eat <u>f</u> astidiously, <u>r</u> avenously, <u>e</u> xcessively, <u>s</u> umptuously, <u>h</u> astily (T. Aquinas)
Brief Definition	Excess in eating/drinking to fill a void in the self, waste; Desire beyond the need
T.V. Mnemonic: <i>Gilligan's Island</i>	The Captain (1 man, 2 vices: anger, gluttony)
*Corruption Of Something Good *Life as....	Right and wise use of food and drink, Right use of all pleasures Life as satisfaction of taste, texture, satiation, consumption
Healing Virtue Blessed are... One word: <i>A</i> *Discipline	Temperance, Self-control The Persecuted, Mt. 5:10 Abstain Fasting & Abstinence, Enroll in Weight Watchers, Join the YMCA, Get Therapy
Desire for...	Something without restraint
*Stereotype	The Connoisseur, the Gourmand,
Impairs a....	Sense of proportion and community
Biblical example	Rich man, Lazarus; Esau and his birthright
Commandments	Possibly theft, coveting, having another god besides the LORD
Effect on others	Revulsion, the <i>fat</i> and <i>obese</i> are marginalized, being joked about and bullied
Key verses	Gen. 3, 25:29-34, Mt. 4:4, 11:19, Titus 1:12
You become... Loss	Immobile, thus the rise in powered wheelchairs Loss of Vitality, Various other accompanying addictions
*Hell is...	Hunger, Thirst, Postponed satisfaction of any type
*Leads to...	Obesity, Self-Indulgence, High morbidity
*Household item	Fridge, Table, Buffet
*Theme song	Dave Matthews: "Too Much"
Emerges as a new layer of the 8 stages. . . (Erickson's developmental scheme) Focuses On...	1) Infancy Bodily functions and cravings to be satisfied
How Dante's Punishment fits the vice	Lie in a pit of mud with sewage raining down = what you created
Social mapping of deadly sins in Nevada	Number of fast food restaurants per capita
*Institutional, Cultural Form Medical Interventions	Fast food, Diet industry, Food shows, Cooking channel Bariatric surgery, Liposuction, Medically supervised fasting
*Personal Evidence	Obesity, Alcoholism, Watching the food channel!
*Excuse	"I'm hungry," "I want to feel good," "I deserve it," "I have big bones!"
Secular Form	Diet craze, thinness fixation, anorexia, the obesity epidemic, health care costs

Thomas Aquinas said of Gluttony: "Gluttony denotes, not any desire of eating and drinking, but an inordinate desire...leaving the order of reason, wherein the good of moral virtue consists." (2, 148, ad 1: *Summa Theologica*)

GLUTTONY: FULL BELLY, EMPTY HEART

“But the fruit of the Spirit is ... self-control”

The last and perhaps most difficult fruit of Christian maturity is self-mastery.

GALATIANS 5 : 2 3

A mother once approached an Indian spiritual leader for assistance with a domestic matter; some say it was the great man Gandhi himself. “My son has horrible eating habits,” she said. “Please, he will listen if you tell him to stop eating foods with so much sugar.”

The silent boy reached into his pocket for another gum ball.

The Teacher listened with hands folded, “I ask that you come back next week and make the request again.”

The mother came back in seven days, only more agitated this time, “My son’s problem continues,” she said. “He rarely eats vegetables or fruits. Won’t you talk to him about the danger of eating too much sugar?”

“Come back in another week,” the Teacher said simply.

Though disappointed, she obeyed and in a week was back. This time the Teacher had a chat with her son.

When the conversation was over, the mother thanked the Teacher. “I am grateful you took time to talk to my son, but why did it take three requests?”

The holy man looked the mother straight in the eye, “I did not realize how hard it would be for me to give up sugar.”¹

A most illumining story on gluttony and leadership! Many assume- despite abundant revelations to the contrary- that spiritual leaders are immune to the same addictive sins as other mere mortals and can work a kind of transformative magic with their words. Not so. It also shows that parents often seek help and expertise-

¹ Adapted from William White, *Stories for the Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1988), 96-97.

whether from counselors, doctors, or pastors- because they've lost control at home. Yes, the boy had an issue, but the problem was *momma*. Over the years I lost a few friends and church members when I pointed out that *junior* was only the presenting problem; if mom and dad would get their acts together, junior might come into line. Who buys the gum balls and *Lucky Charms*? None of us can pass on freedoms we ourselves do not first possess. Like the Indian Teacher, I find God often uses people who come for help to point out areas of *un-freedom and compromise* in my life. I hear their tale of woe and say silently, "I've got some of that in me! Help me, Lord!" There's no high ground at the foot of the cross, nothing but level as far as I can see.

The story also recalls the insight that the best help for one addict is another already in recovery, and you don't have to be that far along to reach back and give someone a hand. We ought the rename Main Street *Sinners Anonymous* and see if we can get over this *look-good-on-Sunday* thing we strut before one another. All of us have the fatal and systemic disease of Original Sin,² and all of us have all seven of the deadly symptoms and their ugly offspring, just in differing combinations and varying intensities. Having a pointed confession of sin at the start of many of our services is exactly the same thing that happens at the start of an AA meeting, "Hello, my name is Phil, and I am an alcoholic." That is the great lesson of Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers and other support groups.³ They are life-change communities for gluttons of drink and gluttons of food. The dynamic of excess is the same. At their best there is nothing like such groups and no substitute for them because- in the case of AA- The Twelve Steps are grounded in a deeply Christian theology which starts with honest confession, "I am powerless over this thing" and ends with the evangelism of inviting another struggler to pick up a chip and find a community of hope through story-telling and day-at-a-time living based on *The Big Book*. We in the church have an even bigger *Big Book* with more stories of new life!

Positive social pressure and group discipline are resources the early Methodists

² Article VII- Of Original or Birth Sin: "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of *every man*, that naturally is engendered of *the offspring of Adam*, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually" (*BOD 2012*, 65).

³ For a good read, see Theresa F. Latini, *The Church And The Crisis Of Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011)

harnessed in their weekly class meetings.⁴ Hard questions were asked, questions like “What temptations have you battled this week?” and, “Where do you feel the most vulnerable right now?” Each one help one; each one cheer for another as you hold each other accountable for behavioral and heart-level change. Sin- and particularly the deadly seven- cannot be fought alone; they are much too insidious and too deeply woven into life to be tickled out by one set of hands only.

So gluttony is last in the classic list of seven: pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, lust, and now gluttony- which has to do not only with food but with any substance, legal or illegal, we use to alter our moods and make us feel good. If you ask gluttony what it wants, the answer is always *More*. If you can add the suffix *o-holic* to it and it still makes sense, then it qualifies as a form of gluttony or excess: food-o-holic, alc-o-holic, work-o-holic, shop-o-holic, sports-o-holic, and for several of the women in my family- Lori of course excluded- shoe-o-holic! The *o-holic* part is from the Greek *holos*, meaning *the whole*- as in the word *cath-olic* meaning *universal* or *according to the whole*. And if the whole of life- meaning your little universe- is about food or drink or work or consumerism or anything else that gives pleasure, then the deadly sin of gluttony is the driver underneath all the variety. Gluttony is by its nature excessive; it’s what it is. Jeff Cook says it’s “...a third car when one will do, a third drink when one is best, a third hobby when the two you started aren’t satisfying enough.”⁵ Our greed for stuff and foodstuffs emaciates our mind and heart by dulling our finer sensitivities, and by consuming what is not needed indirectly takes from others. Thus gluttony and theft, excess and cruelty are twins. Jeff Cook is right:

“Those who consume more than they need deny the excess to others, and in a world like ours, where human beings die from lack of food, water, and medicine, the gluttony of a culture or an individual can mean death for those who ache for our table scraps.... Far from gluttony being a personal sin, it effects the entire planet.”⁶

⁴ On the recovery of the class meeting, see Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed, 2014). On Wesley and class meetings, see Stephen P. Greggo, *Trekking Toward Wholeness: A Resource for Care Group Leaders* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2008), 59-65.

⁵ Jeff Cook, *Seven: The Deadly Sins And Beatitudes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 148.

⁶ *Idem.*, the last sentence is from page 198, note 4.

This sermon might have more credibility were I to shrink by thirty pounds; I am more like the Indian teacher than I care to admit, “I did not know how long it would take me to...” But, as an embarrassing alternative to real credibility, I hope that at the end of this gourmet feast of a message you will have a richer, creamier, smoother, more satisfying and ultimately more filling and fulfilling understanding of gluttony that includes but goes beyond excess food and obesity, though that remains the primary meaning. If you burp at the end of this sermon, I will be satisfied your sermonic meal has been truly satiating.

Gluttony is about all kinds of excess, the seeking of excess pleasure anywhere which leads to imbalance everywhere. It’s asking something (even a marriage or friendship) to deliver more pleasure and satisfaction than it was designed to give; it’s demanding that things- and particularly food- be done *just my way*. It’s more than serving size; it is- as the great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas noted after observing the frailties of his fellow monks- about at least five forms of gluttony:

- 1) eating *fastidiously* with a lust for dainties,
- 2) eating *ravenously* like a brute beast,
- 3) eating *excessively* to dull your senses and put you to sleep,
- 4) eating *sumptuously* to display your wealth, and
- 5) eating *hastily* so as to ignore manners and the deeply social meanings of dining together, and if you take the first letter of each you end up with the acronym F-R-E-S-H.⁷

Gluttony is a many-faceted deadly sin and- like the others- a form of idolatry that displaces God as the center of attention and focus of our affections. In Philippians Paul makes the link with false worship clear when he spoke of some in the church “...whose god is their belly,”⁸ meaning at a minimum that the early church must also have had Methodist covered-dish suppers! Gluttony is digging your grave with a fork, or- at the opposite end of scale- starving yourself through anorexia, both of which are perverse responses to food and thus gluttonous in opposite directions: more than is needed and less than is required.

Gluttony- because it is grounded in the necessity to eat- has rightly been called

⁷ Aquinas’ original list as updated by Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 141-142.

⁸ Philippians 3:19.

a *gateway sin* or *vice*, since the loss of self-control and rationality in something so basic soon leads to lack of self-control in adjoining areas. My own experience with fasting, which is by the way required of all Methodist pastors,⁹ is that it helps with self-control in ancillary areas as well- and I need it! Whenever I stop working out, praying, and fasting, I soon lose balance and feel myself literally devolving in my capacity of follow Christ and lead the church. But when I am- through fasting- aware of the hunger in my stomach and then of my underlying hunger for God, I also become more keenly aware of the dark forces of anger and lust and pride and sloth and envy and anger that assault my soul and so quickly corrode whatever reserves of character have been built up. Fasting as an antidote to the gluttony of food has a way of revealing all the false gods to which I have become so firmly attached. A simple weekly fast undertaken as a spiritual discipline- for me from Wednesday evening to Thursday evening after our prayer meeting- has many benefits.¹⁰ At least once a week I remind myself that my appetites and cravings are not God, and when my belly begins to ache, I ask, Why am I not this hungry for the Lord? It was only to those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness that Jesus promised a filling,¹¹ not to those in a calorie coma.

The trends are not encouraging. In the U.S., 64% are overweight, 30% of adults technically obese. Childhood obesity doubled in the last twenty years. One child in five is obese and at higher risk of type-2 diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnea, liver disease, asthma, and orthopedic problems.¹² If we continue to get larger at current rates, by 2020 about one in five health care dollars spent on people ages 50 to 69 could be a result of obesity, 50% more than now. Obesity is overtaking tobacco as the No. 1 cause of death in US, and both are forms of gluttony.¹³ The Book of Proverbs is right and applies not just individuals but to national economies, "... for

⁹ The "Historic Examination for Admission To Full Connection," *BOD 2012*, 263 asks, "Will you recommend fasting or abstinence, both by precept and example?"

¹⁰ For an introduction to fasting, see Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998), Chapter 4, "Fasting," 47-61.

¹¹ Matthew 5:6.

¹² See Alice Park, "Young Kids, Old Bodies," *Time*, March 3, 2014, 40-44, on the devastation of childhood obesity in the United States.

¹³ Statistics lifted from "Too Much Of A Good Thing," a sermon on Phil. 4:5, www.fbcstamps.com/message.php?messageID=9782&.

the drunkard and glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags.”¹⁴ Addictions and obesity are bankrupting us, so don’t tell me gluttony and excess are victimless crimes and not deadly sins.

It is a basic insight of Scripture that the sin that most clearly lead to the fall from Paradise of Eden was gluttony.¹⁵ Our naive parents wanted *a taste* of what was forbidden. There is no mention of hunger because there was none. It just looked good; their mouths began to salivate. So they violated God’s good boundary. It was gluttony that ruined the world and lead to death for all. Dysfunctional appetites and a distrust of God means pain for all the world. In his novel *Zorba the Greek*, Nikos Kazantzakis has Alexis speak to the boss: "Tell me what you do with the food you eat, and I'll tell you who you are. Some turn food into fat and manure, some into work and good humor, and others, I'm told into God."¹⁶ Food is fuel, and how we live on the energy it gives determines our destiny. Food is not morally neutral; it is laden with implications in its production, distribution, preparation, consumption, and what we do with the leftovers and human waste.

We must eat to live, and the pleasure of food taken with others is a good gift of the God who created taste buds. Jesus barbequed fish and ate warm bread with his disciples even after he was raised, so the resurrection body has this capacity-though many questions remain unanswered.¹⁷ The repeated Christian sacrament is simple food- bread and wine. Jesus once said to all gluttons, “I am the bread of life. He who feasts on me shall not hunger.”¹⁸ But to live to eat and spend your vital energies fantasizing about the next tickling of the taste buds, that is gluttony, and we are awash in it. Think of the emergence of a whole new network- *The Food Channel*- and how chefs are the new celebrities. And what about the ridiculous sport of competitive eating as if it was a new athletics? What is an eating champion but a professional glutton- twenty hot dogs in five minutes for fame and fortune, heart disease and death. My generation of baby boomers who once led the sexual and the lust revolution are now aging out of one set of passions and leading the way into the

¹⁴ Proverbs 23:21.

¹⁵ Jeff Cook, *Seven*, Chapter 7, “Gluttony And The Persecuted,” 146-161.

¹⁶ William R. White, *Fatal Attractions* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1992), 53.

¹⁷ John 21:9.

¹⁸ Paraphrase of John 6:35.

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new gluttony. In recent years we've seen the rise of wine snobs, coffee snobs, an increase in overly expensive fine-dining, exotic food travel, and cooking stores, which all point in one direction- a national epidemic of gluttony with all the costs associated. John Stapert says it well:

"The essence of gluttony is not the consumption of enormous quantities of food, although such consumption may betray gluttony. The essence of gluttony is a false and disproportionate interest in eating. It is the elevation of food to a place of consuming interest."¹⁹

Paul said the same thing in Romans, "For the kingdom of God *is not food and drink* but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."²⁰ The kingdom of God includes meat and drink and pleasures aplenty, but it may not be reduced to them. We were made for God!

The Lord's Prayer teaches us to ask for *daily bread*- simple food. Enough calories and nutritional content for the day's work in his presence. That's all Jesus blesses us to ask for, and then the next day to pray the same again, "Give us this day our daily bread." Jesus also knew how to feast to the glory of God, so much so that hostile onlookers once labeled him a "wine-bibber and glutton,"²¹ a Galilean party boy. There is a time for such sumptuous banqueting, for celebrations involving really good food and wine.²² Weddings, funerals, baptisms, birthdays and anniversaries, reunions and the like. Fine china, crystal and silver, candles and place cards, toasts and good conversation: these turn a meal into a feast of friendship in the presence of God. It can also happen over simpler fare if our hearts are right and the blessing is more than a mumbled ritual.

Jesus also knew how to fast to the glory of God, once for forty days under a ferocity of Satan assault and deception before which we would quickly wilt, and what was the first angle of attack? It was to turn stones to bread to silence his screaming stomach! Satan tempted Jesus to use food to disobey God! He baited Jesus to eat at

¹⁹ Albert Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1988), 78.

²⁰ Romans 14:17.

²¹ Matthew 11:19.

²² John 2:1-12 on the Cana wedding, "but you have saved the good wine till last."

the wrong time- before the fast was rightly over- which is a form of gluttony. There is a time for fasting and abstaining. Jesus told the Evil One we do not thrive on bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.²³ When tempted with gluttony, you can always feed on the Scripture and "taste and see that the Lord is good" through prayer. Spiritual maturity inevitably involves the Spirit's cultivation in us of the virtue of *self-control*, which Paul's lists last as the climax of the nine fruit of the Spirit.²⁴ It also involves the Spirit's active restraint of the great and growing mass of *works of the flesh*, which Paul lists in four categories: 1) all forms of sexual immorality, and here his terms are both broad and deliberately vague: *immorality, impurity, licentiousness*; 2) false religion and occult practices: *idolatry, sorcery*; 3) eight types of interpersonal conflict: *enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissensions, party spirit, envy*; and at the end of the list 4) two forms of gluttony: *drunkenness and carousing*, which we understand as orgies and excessive feasting, and here Paul was thinking of Roman banquets, perhaps even Emperor Nero's.²⁵

Our Lord once asked those obsessed with their next meal, "Is not life more than food?" and expected a *Yes* from all. But the disciples' prayer is for simple daily bread. That this petition comes just before the petition on giving and receiving forgiveness ought to alert us that food and community and sin are closely bound.

Bread and wine are means of grace in the Lord's Supper, crushed wheat and grapes bearing the touch of God. But sitting alone with donuts and beer, Cheetos and chocolate ice cream till you lapse into a belching and bloated sleep is not grace but a path to death as you dig your grave with your own tongue. In a pamphlet titled "Battling an Eating Disorder" Clair B. shares her story:

²³ Matthew 4:4.

²⁴ Galatians 5:22-23.

²⁵ Galatians 5:19-21a. "The Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 56-120) described one of Nero's more elaborate parties, which he said was typical: The festivities were held on a small lake populated with exotic birds, fish, and other animals imported for the occasion. Guests were floated out on rafts to be lured in one direction or another. On one shore were brothels crowded with noble ladies; on another, naked prostitutes enticed the guests. As darkness descended, torches were lit, and the groves and buildings filled with song and laughter. Nero polluted himself by every lawful and lawless indulgence" (Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* [New York: Viking, 1956]). It was in the middle of Nero's decadent reign that Paul wrote about the extremes to which people can go apart from God (www.preachingtoday.com/site/utilities/print.html?type=article&id=24920).

"I was about five years old when I first felt I was not like other people. At a family picnic I realized I had a different relationship with food. After we had finished eating, my sister, several cousins, and I were each given a cookie. My playmate soon ran off to climb on the jungle gym. But one cookie did not seem enough for me. As my parents chatted with relatives, I lingered at the picnic table, quickly devouring more cookies. I was ashamed when my mother discovered I have eaten a dozen more. I had no defense- I just couldn't control myself. Through the years I had many more binges like this. Each time I swore to myself that it would never happen again, that the next time I would must the willpower to control my eating. My addiction eventually led me through periods of self-imposed starvation and binge-purge cycles. Like many who suffer from eating disorders, I did not start my recovery until I learned I had a living problem, not just a food problem."²⁶

When we speak of gluttony, we are ushered into the whole complex web of addictions and the loss of freedom they bring. It is an ugly personal battle, full of shame and defeat. Like many of you, I often turn to food when I should turn to God in prayer with the cravings of my heart for peace and rest after a long day of high-stakes engagement with people that has left me spent and restless with anxiety. And like some of you, when bored I go back to work.

The core issue with the last of the seven deadly sins is not so much what we're eating, but what is eating some of us so deeply that we numb it with a calorie coma or a fog of alcohol? The deadly sin of gluttony is multi-faceted. Gluttony is a psychological issue dealing with what we were taught about food and drink in our family of origin. It is a spiritual, ecological, and finally a justice issue having to do both with world hunger and discrimination against large people in a culture obsessed with thinness. Anorexia, bulimia, body dysmorphic disorder: these are culturally created diseases. When we talk about food- its use and abuse- we very quickly find it connected to all of life, our inner world of emotions and compulsions, and our outer world of work and family and entertainments. What we do with food says much about us. Gluttony is not just a sin of private indulgence; it has enormous social consequences.

God has made us dependent on food, but when food is used like alcohol or

²⁶ Care Notes (St. Meinrad, IN: St. Meinrad Archabbey, 1992), 1-2.

drugs to solve emotional problems, the results are disastrous. All these come under the umbrella of gluttony and excess, substances we ingest to fill an inner emptiness which cannot be filled by anything but God. One writer put it this way, "There is something incongruous about asking God to bless buttered rolls and pecan pie at 10:30PM when none of us needs them."²⁷ If you can't pray over it, don't eat it!

When we use disease terminology to speak about addictions, I understand the intent. The medical model is compassionate. It recognizes more is involved than a weak will. Indulgence does lead to a real loss of freedom; the only freedom the alcoholic may have left is the freedom to admit powerlessness and ask for help, step one of the famous Twelve Steps: "We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable." That single admission has been a doorway to recovery for millions.

Breaking addictions is more than trying hard because the will itself has become corrupted and compromised. Genetics, family history, depression: all these give us a larger picture of the addictions process. But when the literature shows that we all have addictions- some more or less severe than others- are we not come back full circle to talking about the general human condition the old biblical word *sin* points to? Dr. Gerald May speaks about our common, human condition:

"The same processes responsible for addiction to alcohol and narcotics are also responsible for addiction to ideas, work, relationships, power moods, fantasies, and an endless variety of things. We are all addicts in every sense of the word. Moreover, our addictions are our worst enemies. Addictions also makes idolaters of us all, because it forces us to worship these objects of attachment thereby preventing us from truly, freely loving God and one another."²⁸

Whenever the Bible uses the word *sin*, substitute the word *addiction* and you will not be far off mark. It is idolatry; it is making something that is not God the focus of my desires and affections, and it's what all of us are wired for. We are needy people, made so by our Creator. But in this fallen world our cravings have a way of getting nailed to the object of their desire. It feels good at first, and if some is good,

²⁷ Albert Wells, *Inspiring Quotations*, 78.

²⁸ Quoted in Felton May, "Yes, You Do Have A Drug Problem in Your Church," *Circuit Rider*, March 1994, 13.

we think more is better. Relief and pleasure become ends in themselves instead of pleasant byproducts of right actions. I am free to choose in the beginning. But then I end up not-free not to choose; I find something I once had control over now has control over me. I am under it's power and in physical and spiritual bondage. I have forfeited my freedom but not my responsibility and must deal with the consequences. I need help, a merciful, powerful Savior, and also some gracious human being to walk me out of bondage and into the renewed freedom and dignity I long for.

As long as the church continues to be a place to look good, to hide our pain and the ways we numb it through food or liquor or weed or drugs or work or sex or whatever, we miss out on being the community of loving freedom Christ has called us to be.²⁹ We cannot free ourselves, but we are called to participate in maintaining the freedom we've been given as a gift. "For freedom Christ has set us free," wrote Paul, "stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."³⁰ Don't fall back into the pit! It takes spiritual effort and the right use of spiritual disciplines to guard the gift of freedom. It's not our addictions that save us, or our denials; it is the truth, said Jesus, that sets us on the road to freedom.

You are a battleground, always will be. Get used to it. This is not a vacation but a war as announced in our first baptismal vow which clearly lays out the three level of opposition, "Do to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?"³¹ Did not Paul say as much? "For the desires of the fallen nature are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the fallen nature. For these are opposed to one another, to prevent you from doing what you would."³² Sounds like a battle to me! This is the sense in which following Christ greatly complicates life. Before you said Yes to being his apprentice, you were on cruise control, following the ways of the world without much

²⁹ On these issues I have profited from the books of Peter Scazzerro, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2006) and Richard Swenson, MD, *In Search Of Balance* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010).

³⁰ Galatians 5:1.

³¹ *U.M. Hymnal*: 34.

³² Galatians 5:17.

worry, a part of the vast, unthinking, American mob, blinded by pop culture.³³

But now that Christ lives within, you are aware of the conflict on two levels: within and without. We live as subversives behind enemy lines and will till we die on the battlefield. It's why we need Jesus as a big, strong, loving friend; why we need the Holy Spirit as an inward presence of guidance and power, why we need one another as faithful pilgrims. Stakes are high. You don't want to become the kind of person who through the long and stubborn practice of the vices of the fallen nature could not be at home in the kingdom of God, as Paul said at the center of our passage, "I warned you, as I warned you before (and remember he's speaking to Christians!), that those who do such things (meaning that through habit they become *those kind of people*: immoral, idolatrous, corrupted, given to excesses) will not inherit the kingdom of God."³⁴

And why not? Because they developed no appetite for it, no desire in that direction. They neither saw nor sought the kingdom of God as displayed in Jesus. They gave themselves over to the seven deadly sins and the works of the fallen nature Paul lists and put up no resistance and so were molded into the form of what they followed. They became what they practiced. They would not fit in God's new world, so other arrangements are made for those who do not wish to live within the circle of love and light that is the Holy Trinity and of which we have a preview in the life of Jesus. They get what they sought, the endless torment of an unfulfilled self, and to them God says, "O.K. If that's what you've become by persistently ignoring me, Thy will be done. Have at it! I confirm the direction you have chosen."³⁵

While waiting at a traffic light with her parents in Atlanta, Kevin and Joan Salwen's 14-year-old daughter Hannah saw a black Mercedes coupe on one side and a homeless man begging for food on the other. Hannah turned to her father, "Dad, if that man had a less nice car, that man there could have a meal."

³³ For a rich parallel from Paul's world, read Ephesians 2:11-22.

³⁴ Galatians 5:21b.

³⁵ That there is an ultimate division is clearly taught in the U.M. *Confession of Faith*, Article XII, The Judgment and the Future State: "We believe all men stand under the righteous judgment of Jesus Christ, both now and in the last day. We believe in the resurrection of the dead; the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation" (BOD: 74).

Even as they pulled away, Hannah insisted she wanted to do something about the inequity. "What do you want to do?" her mother asked.

"Sell our house," Hannah replied.

Eventually, that's what the Salwen's did. They sold their luxurious home, donated half the proceeds to charity, and bought a modest replacement. Though the sacrifice was great, the benefits were greater. A smaller house meant a more family-friendly house. "We essentially traded stuff for togetherness and connectedness," Kevin says. "I can't figure out why everybody wouldn't want that deal."

The entire project is chronicled in a book by Kevin and his daughter titled *The Power of Half*.³⁶ The aim isn't to get people to sell their houses, it's to encourage them to step off the *treadmill of accumulation*- to define themselves by what they give, not just by what they possess; in other words- to say *No* to the gluttony of more.

Hannah says, "For us, the house was just something we could live without. It was too big for us. Everyone has too much of something, whether it's time, talent, or treasure. Everyone does have their own half; you just have to find it."³⁷

Gluttony and excess is about living large and always craving more; discipleship is about lean and hungry for Christ and learning the values and practices of his upside-down kingdom. Gluttony is more than expanding girth; it's symptom we're missing the One who deeply satisfies. Kazantzakis was right, "Tell me what you do with the food you eat, and I'll tell you who you are. Some turn food into fat and manure, some into work and good humor, and others, I'm told into God."

So, my friends, which shall it be? Who shall rule us and our unruly appetites? There is one, I am told, who rules by love, and to his table you are today invited.

³⁶ (New York, NY: Houghton-Mifflin, 2010).

³⁷ Nicholas Kristof, "What Could You Live Without?" nytimes.com (1-24-10). For a challenging story of downward mobility and kingdom disruption, see Richard Stearns, *The Hole In Our Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2009). Stearns left a lucrative career in sales to become CEO of World Vision- the largest Christian relief agency.
