

Gluttony - Part 2: Defeating Gluttony

PAUL MATTHIES, *November 12, 2006*

Good evening. My name is Paul Matthies. I serve as the membership pastor here at the Village Church. Matt will be returning from vacation next weekend, but for this weekend, we will be finishing the second half of a two-part series on the sin of gluttony. Last week, I began a series on the sin of gluttony in an effort to literally thin out the crowds. And last weekend, we sought to biblically define the sin of gluttony. And after discussing the misconceptions about this sin, we arrived at the following definition. "Commonly seen in eating, gluttony is a lack of faith in God that expresses itself through excess and expects total satisfaction from some idol of choice at the expense of community, responsibility and trusting worship of God." Now this definition emphasizes that gluttony is not simply the act of overeating. On occasion, God calls and commands His people to feast. And the problem is not with the act of overeating, but with the living a life that is characterized by excess and isolation opposed to moderation and community. And we also discussed how being overweight is not necessarily a sign of gluttony or that being slender does not excuse you from the sin of gluttony. Instead, the fruit of gluttony is irresponsibility and slothfulness, not a certain body size or shape. And we talked about how gluttony can surface in other areas besides food such as shopping or video gaming or watching television. Basically any idol that keeps us from loving God and loving our neighbors can make us gluttonous. And finally, we saw that gluttony was not so much about food as it is our hearts. It is not sinful to enjoy food. But the ultimate goal is to enjoy God through the enjoyment of food. Sin happens when we fail to acknowledge God for His provision of food or when we go to food to get only what God can give us, which is eternal joy. And this week, as promised, we will move the discussion from biblically defining gluttony to biblically defeating gluttony, and we're going to talk about ten Scriptural observations tonight regarding our battle against gluttony. Let me say right now that this is not a ten-step weight loss program. These are ten observations to help you and edify you as you seek to battle the sin of gluttony in your life. But I will say that as I've sought out to live these truths in my life, I have experienced great freedom in the area of the sin of gluttony. Why? Because God's word is living and active. And the Spirit empowers us as we seek to be transformed by the renewing of our minds as opposed to conforming to the world's standards and the world's opinions.

I'd like to begin our journey together by opening our Bibles to 1 Timothy 4:1-10. And I will read that for us now. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe."

Let's pray. "Father, we come before You tonight setting our hope on You, the Living God. And Father, we came to be changed through an encounter with You tonight. So Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear tonight. Father, sanctify us tonight through Your truth. Your word is truth. And Father, we come now humbly asking You to implant the word into our hearts, that it may bear fruit as we seek to battle the sin of gluttony. And we ask this now in Jesus' name. Amen."

Now, this passage contains much rich teaching concerning what I would like to call a gospel-centered, spirit-filled, grace-motivated view of eating. And the first principle we see in this passage is that when battling gluttony, we must first avoid legalism. Paul warns Timothy against those who teach the doctrine of demons, as one translation calls it. And included in that teaching is the idea that one must abstain from certain foods in order to be holy in the sight of God. Or to put it another way, the doctrine of demons is the tendency to demonize food. It is walking in the spirit of legalism that thinks, "If I just avoid certain foods, I am okay with God." It is dealing with the externals without dealing with the internals. It is believing that your outward behavior and rules can make you right with God instead of dealing with the deeper emotional and spiritual issues behind the sin of gluttony. Have you ever tried to demonize foods? Have you ever said, "Salads are pleasing to God, but sweets and Mexican food are from Satan?" You know, honestly I believe that most American forms of dieting are really forms of legalism. It's trying to set up man-made rules, deprive yourself and demonize foods. And last week, we talked about how food is not intrinsically evil; it's our heart that is the real issue. In 1 Corinthians 8:8, Paul tells us, "Food will not commend us to God." And in 1 Timothy, he says, "Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected." And he's likely thinking back to the end of Mark 7, where Jesus declares all foods clean in His sight. Now, please here me say that I'm not intending to discourage you from a healthy diet. The goal is indeed moderation. It's eating wholesome foods and well-balanced meals. It's paying attention to your nutrition and avoiding excess in your calorie counts. We can think about the example of Daniel who avoided getting into a culture of excess in Daniel 1, and God blessed him for it. The issue is not with a healthy diet, the issue is with dieting. You see, the law brings death, but the Spirit brings life. And sometimes we think to ourselves, "You know, I really need to lose weight. So for these next three weeks, I'm going to go on a diet. I'm going to deprive myself, I'm going to live according to rules and I'm going to stay away from that bad food and I'm just white-knuckle it. And that's going to take care of all my problems." But that's assuming that the problem is external and that food is evil, and it never gets to the heart issue. And the Spirit wants to change our hearts. You see, the Spirit wants us to enjoy God. And He wants to empower us and teach us to enjoy God through enjoying food and living within God's fullest design. And we must be ever-mindful to let the Holy Spirit speak to our hearts and reveal the deeper emotional and spiritual issues behind the sin of gluttony. You see, overeating is just a symptom of a heart problem and a lack of faith in God. And white-knuckle dieting just attacks the symptoms. But the Spirit wants to empower you for a life of spiritual wisdom and moderation that sees the deeper truths behind gluttony. Now if this idea piques your interest and you want to learn more about the Spirit-led moderation and law-led dieting, I can think of no better book than a book called "Lose It for Life" by Stephen Arterburn. He is the author of "Every Man's Battle." And if you want to cast off the bonds of legalism as you attempt to battle the sin of gluttony, I would recommend that you purchase this book and read it as he covers the emotional and spiritual issues behind the sin of gluttony.

I would like to spend more time on that topic, but we do have to move on to the next observation which is Paul next tells us to receive food with thanksgiving. And here we must ask ourselves, "Are we really taking time to thank God and think upon God while we're eating? Are we cultivating a heart of thankfulness as we eat our food? Or are we merely indulging our hungers and thinking only about ourselves?" So how do we cultivate a grateful heart as we eat our meals? Well Paul tells us that food is made holy by the word of God in prayer. We sanctify our food, we sanctify our feasting by the word of God in prayer. And here can think of several practical things we can do around the dinner table in order to sanctify that experience. The first thing you can do is, when you get your food, pray. And don't merely pray generic table prayers but spend time praying according to the Scriptures in talking about the greatness of God in your life. Maybe you could also share prayer concerns around the dinner table or prayer updates and praises and talk about the ways that God is moving in your life and in the lives of others and make the dinner table a time of rich prayer. Maybe you could read a Scripture passage before you eat your meal together. Maybe you could review your memory verse for the day or the week or have your child repeat their memory verse from Kid's Village. Or maybe you could have your pre-schooler review their core value statement from the Little Village. I had the privilege of eating with Rick and Leigh Kingsley a few weeks ago. And they invited me into their home, and they have a son Meisha who was recently diagnosed with autism. But the awesome

thing about what God has done in Meisha's heart and in his mind is that he's beginning to grasp those core values statements. And when you begin one of those core values statements, he's able to finish it. And before our meal, we said, "Meisha, God is..." And he yelled out "Good!" And we said, "Meisha, we can talk with..." And he said, "God!" And that was a holy moment for us as we took time to celebrate the goodness of God in the life of Meisha and thank the Lord for what He had done for that family. And so, maybe that's something you can also do with your family before your meal. And finally, maybe let your conversation around the table be meaningful and edifying. Let your speech center on the goodness of God. Don't make the dinner table a place of fighting but a place of edifying.

And use that time to enjoy God and one another. Notice how these truths best take place in community which leads us to our next point, that if we are to battle gluttony, we must consider others. We must consider others. If the root of gluttony is self-centeredness, then we must do all we can to battle selfishness in our lives, not merely at meal time but in all other areas of our life as well. And we should meditate on Philippians 2:3-4 which says, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." I used to have a bad habit of going out to eat by myself and bringing a good book with me and reading the book and eating the meal by myself. And while there's nothing wrong with that, I've learned that I can't eat in isolation all the time. God intends for our meals to be enjoyed in the context of community. And do you know what I've learned? When I've asked others to join me, I'm so engaged in conversation that I'm not shoving food into my mouth as fast or as much. So it's important not to eat in isolation all the time. Next, get outside of yourself and do things that make you see others and their pain. Maybe you should join a ministry through Servant Central. Maybe you could go on a mission trip or serve in local missions. Maybe you can adopt a Compassion child or practice hospitality. Invite others from your home group or others in the church into your home. If you're a family here tonight, why don't you consider inviting some poor college students over to your house? Practice hospitality. Maybe your family has grown cold and unappreciative to your cooking. But I promise you, these college students will brag about your food until they get seconds and until they get leftovers to take home with them. So look around and invite some of them into your home. I promise you, your kids will think they're the coolest things ever and they will love your cooking. So practice hospitality. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul rebukes the church of Corinth for eating communion bread at the exclusion of others. He said that they would come to church hungry and they would eat all the bread before others had a chance to partake. They came thinking only of themselves and their needs. And here's a real question for you. Do you come to church thinking only of your needs whether physical or spiritual? Do your prayers center on you or your family alone or are you praying for others in this church and the nations when you come to the church? When Paul spoke about taking communion in an unworthy manner, he was not only talking about eating while you were in known sin. He was talking about coming to church and thinking only about yourself, your problems, your sins, your needs, without ever taking time to consider others and think of your neighbor.

Which leads us to another observation, that a believer is called to fast. Fasting is denying your physical appetite in order to cultivate your spiritual appetite. To quote a great "PUB" article, it is "expanding your God palate." It is giving up something such as a meal or watching television and spending that time instead in seeking God. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus is actually going to teach us about fasting, and when you look at that passage, you're going to notice something interesting. Jesus says, "When you fast..." Notice that Jesus does not say, "If you fast, do it in this way." Instead, He says, "When you fast, do it in this way." Jesus is assuming that if you are a believer in Christ, you are going to be regularly practicing the discipline of fasting. Earlier in Matthew 6, Jesus also says, "When you give to the needy..." And the early church actually tied these two commands, "When you fast" and "When you give to the needy," together. And I want you to consider their example from a book called "The Trouble With Jesus" by Joseph Stowell. "They would often fast, not for their own gain or spiritual advantage, as we so often do, but rather to take the money they would have spent on groceries and give it to the poor. The early church father Hermas wrote, 'On the day when you fast, take only bread and wine. Calculate the amount of food you would have taken on other days, put aside the money you would have spent on

it and give it to the widow, the orphan or the poor.' Origen of Alexandria said: 'Let the poor man be provided with good from the self-denial of him who fasts.'" You see, at the same time, they were cultivating a love for God and a love for their neighbor. The two greatest commands are being practiced in one practical act. Now, if this idea of fasting is new to you, I would also like to recommend another book to you called "A Hunger for God" by John Piper. And this book is going to talk about the practical aspects and the spiritual truths behind the discipline of fasting. So if you would like to learn more about what it means to regularly fast and to cultivate a spiritual appetite, I recommend "A Hunger for God."

But we'll move on to our next observation that in our battle against gluttony, we must keep the gospel central. Now the question here is: Where are you finding your identity and worth? Whenever you are looking for love, are you going to the world or are you looking to the cross of Christ? When thinking about our appearance and when looking in the mirror, we should consider the gospel. We do not need to be a certain size or look a certain way in order to be loved by God. As Matt so often reminds us, God does not love some future version of us; we are loved today right where we are exactly how we look. And we should be motivated by Christ's love for us. We should put our hope in God's unchanging love toward those in Christ, not in the changing passions and pleasures of the world. Yet at the same time, we must face the stark reality that, according to 1 Samuel 16:7, the Lord judges according to the heart, but man judges according to the outward appearance. And in keeping the gospel central, we must also ask ourselves, "Is my food or appearance a stumbling block to the lost?" In 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14, Paul is going to tell us that, while we do find our worth in the gospel, we should also consider how our outward appearance or our food choices could potentially damage our witness for the gospel. And let me tell you how this plays itself out. I was sitting at the gym several months ago with a friend who is an unbeliever. And we were eating breakfast together and we paused in the middle of the meal and he looked at me and said, "You know what, Paul? You and I are a lot alike." He said, "You and I love food a lot. I've seen the way you eat." Now in that moment, I realized that he had probably seen my love for food more than my love for Christ. And I realized in that moment that he had probably heard me talk more about good pizza in great restaurants more than my relationship with Jesus. And I had to ask myself at that moment, "Though God loves me right where I'm at, is the place I'm at most beneficial for the gospel message?" God loves you where you're at, but is the place you're at most beneficial for the gospel message? And I had to concede that the picture of an athlete is a better biblical picture when considering the gospel than the picture of the overweight guy who's passionate about his food. You see, several times in Scripture, in Philippians 3 and 1 Corinthians 9, Paul uses athletes and athletics to describe spiritual truths, such as reward and discipline and perseverance. And I had to recognize that when I was 292lbs a year ago, if I would have stood up on the stage and preached to you about self-control, I would have been a hypocrite, and I would have been somebody who was a stumbling block to you. And I had to recognize and repent that if I continued to be as overweight as I was, then I was not an example of someone who love the Lord God with all his heart, mind, soul and strength, which is evidenced by my relationship with food. So now I am motivated to work out, not to try to earn God's love but to try to earn an unbeliever's respect in hopes that my food and my appearance will not be a stumbling block to the gospel message lest he look at me and say, "Who are you to talk about finding comfort in Christ? I've seen the way you eat."

But this leads you to the next point of consideration. We must consider the value of bodily training. In 1 Timothy 4:8, Paul tells us that physical training does have value for this life. You know, it's important to work out. And maybe that doesn't take place in a gym, maybe you just need to be more active or work harder or find creative ways to get some exercise. But for me, I needed the help of others. I needed an entire team of experts to help me figure out how to lose weight. The Lord really spoke to my heart and He said, "Paul, I know you're a guy, but don't let pride keep you from asking others for help. You may not know everything." And so, I had to develop a friendship with several trainers including my current trainer, Eric Gunn. And I have a wonderful relationship with Eric and to me, working out with Eric is a complete statement of trust. You see, in the gym, I am like a kindergartener in Chemistry class. I have no idea what I'm doing and I'm completely reliant on Eric to train me. And sometimes he asks me to do some really crazy things. And to be honest with you, it's hard to consider the value of bodily training when he asks me to do bear crawls. Have any of you

ever done bear crawls? Stupid, stupid exercise. And one time Eric asked me to walk backwards on a treadmill while we threw a medicine ball back and forth. And I had to ask myself, "Why am I paying to look like a circus bear?" But you know, I have to completely trust him because every time I trust him, it bears fruit in the end. And in the same way, it's helped me to grow spiritually and to relate that to my relationship with God. Because sometimes God asks me to do stuff that doesn't always feel good or make sense, but if I trust Him and go through with it, it will bear fruit and bring life. And through training with Eric, I've been able to relate it to my relationship with God and train myself for godliness as I try to train physically.

And that leads us to our next observation. In order to train ourselves for godliness, we must be filled with the Spirit. If we expect to defeat the sin of gluttony, we must recognize the essential role of the Holy Spirit in overcoming sin in our lives. Consider what Paul writes in Ephesians 5:18. "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." We must come before the Lord and acknowledge our absolute dependence on Him to reveal the sin in our lives and to empower us to repent of that sin. And Paul's using an interesting analogy here because he's saying, "Every time you go to a bottle of wine and get drunk, you are surrendering control to it. You are going to that bottle of wine and saying, 'I am giving over control to you, I am going to lose all inhibitions and I am going to be mastered by you.'" And Paul is saying here, "Quit going to lesser things than God. If you're going to surrender to anything or anyone, go before your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ and say, 'I surrender to You. I want to give You control of my life. I want to be mastered by You.'" If anyone is to be your master, it's not to be food, it's not to be wine, it's to be Jesus. And if Jesus is your master, He is going to empower you by His Spirit to overcome your sins and become more like Christ. And indeed according to Galatians 5, one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. You probably remember all those campy songs about the fruits of the Spirit, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...self-control!" And notice how self-control is at the end of the list and sometimes we don't give it primacy, but we have to understand that when we are filled with the Spirit, part of the fruit of that is self-control. Have any of you ever gotten one of those annoying spam e-mails about appetite suppressants? They say, "If you'll just eat this appetite suppressant, then you will finally get control of your hunger and not give into your food cravings." Let me tell you something. We don't need man-made concoctions if we're believers in Christ. Because when you're filled with the Spirit, you've been given the fruit of self-control. And we don't need the world's help in order to achieve self-control; we only need to go to the Lord and ask Him to fill us with His spirit and give Him control so that we can bear the fruit of self-control in our lives. If we expect to have spiritual wisdom and a knowledge of God's will, we must be filled with the Spirit. If we expect to walk in freedom in the area of gluttony, we must walk by the Spirit and it's crucial to understand and know God the Holy Spirit's role in your life as a believer. And if you want to know more about the role of the Holy Spirit in overcoming idols in your life, particularly in the area of food, there's a great book called "Love to Eat, Hate to Eat" by Elyse Fitzpatrick. And I would recommend this book to you if you want to know more about God the Holy Spirit and how He empowers us to overcome idols in our lives.

But it's not only essential to be filled with the Spirit, it's also essential for a believer to remember your destiny. And your destiny, according to Romans 8:26-30, is to look like Jesus. And here I have to say, don't make Hollywood your standard. Have any of you ever seen those before/after model pictures? So many times, even in the church, we say, "Before picture, me...after picture, Brad Pitt. That's my goal." Or "Before picture, me...after picture, Angelina Jolie." And we make Hollywood our standard. The Bible is going to tell us that if we're going to have an after picture, it needs to be Christ washing the feet of His disciples. Our goal and our destiny is to look like Christ, not like Hollywood. And we shouldn't go to the mirror and ask ourselves, "Do I look better today and more like Hollywood stars?" Instead, we should go to the mirror and ask ourselves, "Am I looking more and more like Christ today than I did yesterday?" Interestingly, according to Isaiah 53:2, Christ was not beautiful in form. It says, "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." Christ was not a good-looking guy. Pay no attention to the Hollywood Jesus, which is the California surfer dude with great abs on a crucifix. Instead, the Scriptures are very clear that Christ had no beauty or majesty that we should desire Him. And if you're just kind of plain looking like I am, you probably look more like the real,

physical Jesus than people who are aesthetically beautiful. So we must recognize that when it says to look like Jesus, the goal is not to be good looking but to conform our character to the character of Christ. So if you're going to look in a mirror, we are to look in the mirror of God's word. Studying God's word is the key to looking like Christ. James 1 talks about believers who walk away from the mirror of God's word and they forget who they are. And they undergo an identity crisis and they forget who they're called to be. And instead, they go to the world and ask the world for their opinion and seek the world's standards as opposed to being conformed to the image of Christ. But James 1 makes it clear that the goal is to look like Christ and we look like Christ by beholding His character in the word and we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. It is impossible to look like Christ apart from reading and studying the word of God. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." - Matthew 4:4 And we are called to feast upon the Scriptures and to devour the word of God. Some of you tonight might be thinking, "Well gosh Paul, you sure have mentioned a lot of verses tonight." And I can see that I may have used a lot of verses in this sermon, but let me ask you something. Have I used that many verses or has your spiritual appetite grown too weak? Have we forgotten what it means as a church to feast upon God's word? Maybe it's not that there are too many verses, maybe our spiritual appetites have grown small. You know, we like our meals "Biggie Sized" but not our sermons. We live in a culture that wants hour-long dramas on television but 15 minute fluff sermons. And I'm here to say that 45 minute sermons are not an example of over-indulgent preaching. Fifteen minute sermons is an example of a culture whose spiritual appetites are way too small. So we need to ask ourselves if maybe preaching these days isn't too much, maybe our spiritual appetites are too weak. And in order to fulfill our destiny to look like Christ, we must learn to keep our eyes upon the mirror of God's word and to feast upon every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And this is to be a daily thing. Day and night we are called to meditate on the word of God as David says.

Yet it's not just a matter of reading the word that matters, it's a matter of living it out. And that's why we must be accountable. In John 15, the Lord makes it clear that if I wish to bear fruit that remains, if I expect to abide in His love, if I expect to defeat gluttony, I must keep His commands. And if I expect to keep His commands, I need the help of others in my life. You see, accountability is not trying to earn the love of God, that's legalism. Accountability is about safeguarding your joy in God. It's about surrounding yourself with others who recognize that the best life is a surrendered life and a surrendered life is a life that's in alignment with God's word. And Hebrews 10:24-25 encourages us and says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Personally, I need people in my life to ask me the tough questions. "Paul, are you eating right?" Not, "Stay away from that!" People who are willing to say, "Sure Mexican food is okay, sure having a piece of cake is alright, but have you counted the cost? Have you counted the cost of what it's going to mean if you eat that? Are you living a life of moderation or are you trying to live a life of excess? Are you going to food for emotional fulfillment or are you spending time going to God in prayer? Have you gone to the gym this week? Have you worked out? Have you been faithful in training physically? And while you're training yourself physically, you're also training yourself for godliness. Are you in the word?" And so, we need others in our lives in order to be accountable. But sometimes people, believers particularly, ask, "Paul, why do you take this weight thing so seriously? Do you really think that eating right and working out is going to make me live longer? Aren't I just going to go home whenever God takes me? So why do I have to eat right?" And that's a common battle whenever I talk with someone about accountability in this area. But I believe that being healthy has not changed the quantity of my days on earth. Psalm 139 makes it clear that my days are numbered. All the days that God has for me have been foreordained. So being healthy does not change the quantity of my days on earth, but being healthy has everything to do with the quality of my days on earth. And experiencing freedom and victory in the area of gluttony has freed me up to live in the freedom that Christ has purchased for me. And so now I recognize that God's sovereignty in and over my life does not release me from responsibility of battling the sin in my life. I am going to give an account to God for the way that I have lived my life. In the end of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul makes it clear that our bodies are Christ's purchased possession and we are to glorify Him with it and we will give an account for what we've done with our bodies. And I would

like to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." So I believe that being accountable has everything to do with the quality of the freedom of my life on earth, not the quantity of it. And I'm going to be accountable for the way I live my life, and I need others in this area if I expect to experience victory.

There are other areas to face, which leads us to our next observation. It's important to face other idols. I'm essentially closing with the same thought as the apostle John who says in 1 John 5:21, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." In Mark 7, Jesus said that there are many things that flow from our hearts, not just gluttony. And do you know what I've found? When I started to experience victory in the area of food and gluttony, other sins began surfacing, such as anger and lust. Why? Well, because I quit stuffing food down to avoid unwanted emotion or intimacy with others. And when I quit going to food, I now had to face the things I tried to avoid and I had to own up to my emotional issues and I had to own up to my intimacy issues. So now I have to battle with anger. Sometimes I'm talking with someone and they're beginning to frustrate me, and now I begin thinking to myself, "Oh my gosh! I've been working out, I can actually take this guy. It's on. Bring it. Meet me in the church foyer. I will clean it with your face." So now I have to learn to battle anger in my life. And instead of stuffing that down with food, now I have to own up to it. In the same way, now I see a girl that I find attractive and I think to myself, "Well, now maybe she'll pay me a passing glance, maybe a little something, something." And so I have to safeguard my heart against lust. I have to prepare myself to face other idols. Johnathan Edwards once said that our hearts are idol making factories. And we have to face the reality that as soon as we defeat one idol, often times we will fall prey to a new one lest we are careful. We must continue to put on the full armor of God. There might be things that you are dealing with that you don't know that you're dealing with because you've been worshiping at the wrong altar for so long. And when I quit worshiping at the altar of food, suddenly all these new things surfaced I suddenly had to deal with. I think that's why most people return to overeating. Because once they quit overeating, all of a sudden this other junk creeps up, and they try to run away from it. It's just so hard to deal with. And so we must prepare ourselves to face other idols.

And ladies and gentlemen, we must also guard ourselves against starving ourselves in order to beat gluttony. Whenever we allow legalism, a spirit of legalism, whenever we allow a false standard of the world and Hollywood and whenever we allow the idol of self and the fear of man to consume us, often it will give rise to other eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. A year ago, I sat in a counselor's office because I had started a three day starving/one day bingeing cycle, and I had to go to him for help on the onslaught of bulimia. And the reason why is I had given into a spirit of legalism and I wasn't looking into the mirror of God, I was looking in the mirror and I was so concerned about gaining one more pound that I would starve myself. I was giving into the false standards of Hollywood and the false standards of television. And I was allowing the fear of man and idol of self and being so concerned about what you thought of me, that I gave rise to another idol in the name of bulimia. Now consider a portion of an e-mail I received this week from a recovered anorexic who is a member here at the church. She wrote, "I was very interested in hearing of your struggle with gluttony and the fact that the same thing lies at the root of it as lie at the root of anorexia and bulimia. With those disorders, the need to be in control is so strong. Just as you pointed out that often for you, food is a way of controlling your world and comes from not putting your faith in God, I see anorexia and bulimia as gluttonous in themselves due to the root of the issues, setting up an idol of excess instead of trusting God. The excess in those cases just happens to be excess purging." That's very deep, because we see whether we are gorging ourselves or starving ourselves, the root of the problem is that we have taken our eyes off of Jesus and we have set up new idols in our life and we've given into a spirit of demonizing food, walking in legalism and paying more attention to what the world says is beautiful instead of conforming our character to the character of Christ. And beloved, we must be careful not to replace old idols with new ones.

In closing, my heart's desire these past two weekends was to encourage your hearts towards godliness. I didn't want to talk about a weight loss program, I didn't want to talk about a workout program, because I believe that there are others better trained in those areas who can help you. But I'm here to warn you and say that I love you enough to say that there

are deeper emotional and spiritual issues behind the battles and the idols in our lives. And we must train ourselves for godliness and we must let the word of God penetrate our hearts. And it's my firm belief that, as you seek to defeat gluttony, it is essential to avoid legalism, to receive food with thanksgiving, to consider others, to fast, to keep the gospel central, to consider the value of bodily training, to be filled with the Spirit, to remember your destiny, to be accountable and to prepare yourself to face other idols. And beloved, we must be on guard. And I would like to end with Hebrews 13:9 that says, "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, which have not benefited those devoted to them." Loved ones, my prayer for you over these past two weeks is that your heart will be strengthened by grace and that God would give you victory and freedom in the area of gluttony.

Let us pray. "Father, thank You for Your word. Thank You for freedom. Thank You for what Christ has done upon the cross, that we no longer have to gratify the desires of the flesh but that we can walk in the Spirit. And Father, I pray tonight that You would strengthen the hearts of your people with grace. And Father, we ask forgiveness for those times where we have turned to the world instead of to You. Father, forgive us for those times when we've looked to Hollywood as our standard and not to Your Son. Father, forgive us for those times when we've sought fulfillment in food instead of finding Joy in Your presence. Father, help us to safeguard our hearts against idols. Give us freedom in this area of gluttony. Father, bless us as we seek to honor Your word. And we ask this now in Jesus' name and for His glory. Amen."

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