

Text: Mt 11.19

Today's question for "Ask the Pastor" comes from an unusual source, me.

I was struck by the mention of gluttony in Dt 21 a few weeks ago, so I thought I'd like to study a little more about it when I had a chance. I added it to my "Ask the Pastor" list so that it might come up as an option.

I have a couple of other questions on the list, but some of them require me to think a little harder (and you know how hard that is...), so they are percolating. I'd also like to encourage you to submit other questions so I can be "stocked up."

Now, gluttony. What does it mean?

Most people have an idea about what it means, and either try to push it to the back of their minds (if they are overweight) or to sneer at others who are larger than they are.

I confess to both perspectives!

But is gluttony merely over-eating? We will find out what the Bible teaches about it, but, frankly, the data are not plentiful!

We will start with the accusation of gluttony thrown at Jesus in Mt 11.19.

Mt 11.19 "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

There is a parallel passage in Luke 7.34.

We have no idea what Jesus looked like, but for someone who walked about as much as he did, who wasn't wealthy, one would have to imagine he wasn't overweight. (Our mental picture is highly affected by religious art, so we really have no idea.)

So, assuming Jesus wasn't overweight, why would his enemies call him a gluttonous man? And still we have our question, what is gluttony?

I. The "gluttony" passages

Dt 21.20 "They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.'

Pr 23.20-21 Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, *Or* with gluttonous eaters of meat;²¹ For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe *one* with rags.

Pr 28.7 He who keeps the law is a discerning son, But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father.

Mt 11.19 “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

Lk 7.34 “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’

Tit 1.12 One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”

A. Common features

1. Commonly connected with drunkenness
2. Commonly connected with bad companions

By “commonly” I don’t mean “always”

B. The underlying words

1. Titus 1.12, *gastēr* lit., “belly”
 - a. Often used in an idiom of pregnancy “has it in the belly”
 - b. Only in Tit 1.12 is it in this context of dissolution and dissipation

2. Mt and Lk, *fagos* lit., “eater”

“a hedonistic person that eats as a life-style of pleasure, implying voracious greed and idleness”¹

3. OT passages, *zālal*, lit. “*be light, worthless, make light of, squander, be a glutton, be vile*”²

¹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

² Leon Wood, “554 לָלַץ,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 244.

“Only in [Pr 23.20-21] is food mentioned. It is possible that the reference is not to the amount of food eaten (i.e. gluttony) but to the manner of banqueting (KJV ‘riotous eaters of flesh’).³

One could suppose food is implied in Dt 21, due to the connection with drunkenness

4. Only the Deuteronomy passage pronounces a severe penalty for such a son: death
 - a. We react to this passage as extreme – just for over-eating someone gets the death penalty?
 - b. A recent find in Biblical Archaeological Review helped me understand this passage

“This English rendering of ‘a glutton and a drunkard’ for *zôlêl wasôbê*’ (Hebrew: זולל וסבא זולל) has largely been assumed without investigating the food and drink consumed by the rebellious son in the text’s particular cultural context. The severe punishment appears to those of us in the modern West to be at odds with the alleged crime. What did the rebellious son do that was so threatening to the community that stoning was required?”

“Since nothing suggests that consuming large quantities of food or drink per se was seen as detestable or deserving death in ancient Israel, the crime of the rebellious son in *Deuteronomy 21:18-21* could not be gluttony and drunkenness as we know them today. To understand what he did wrong, we must look at the contexts in which food was eaten and the socioreligious customs associated with food and drink.”

“Laws such as the centralization of sacrifice in *Deuteronomy 12* and the law of the rebellious son in *Deuteronomy 21:18-21* were likely created in response to

³ Wood, 244.

the widespread sacrifices to other deities across the land.”

“The Hebrew word *zôlēl* (זולל), commonly translated as ‘glutton,’ in this passage is difficult to render in a way that conveys its socioreligious meaning, as there is no real equivalent in English. This is also the case for the word *sōbē’* (סבא), which is frequently translated as ‘drunkard.’ Perhaps a better translation of this passage would be, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a deviant eater and a deviant drinker.’ This translation would place the rebellious son’s actions in the clearer context of non-Yahwistic worship—specifically the accepted foodways—a crime that is repeatedly proscribed in the Bible and carries the penalty of death.”⁴

- c. The Dt passage must be talking about an extreme of deviation that involves some kind of idolatrous behaviour
- d. The meaning in the Dt passage is not necessarily the same as in the Proverbs passages, though it is related

II. Other passages

There are other passages that imply over-indulgence in food or other substances, but none use the specific words for gluttony

A. Abandoned to desires

¹ Pt 4.3-4 For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. ⁴ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*;

⁴ Rebekah Walton, “Gluttony and Drunkenness in Ancient Israel,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 46, no. 5 (Winter 2020): 52–57.

Rm 16.18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Ecc1 6.7 ¶ All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied.

Pr 27.20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, Nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.

Pr 30.15 The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give." There are three things that will not be satisfied, Four that will not say, "Enough":

B. An echoing passage, but turning to a solution

Phil 3.17-21 ¶ Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.¹⁸ (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ:¹⁹ Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things.)²⁰ For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:²¹ Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

III. The transformed temperament

Phil 3.18-21 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ,¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Ps 34.8 O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

Ecc 2.24 ¶ There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.

1 Cor 6.12-13 ¶ All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.

A. Ultimate definition of gluttony: a life given over to sensuality, especially as symbolized by sating one's self with food

B. Ultimate cure of gluttony: a life devoted to our Lord Jesus, self-controlled, a wise steward of the gifts God gave him

Conclusion:

We have to eat to live, but we don't have to live to eat!

The land of plenty we live in allows us to be undisciplined in so many ways. While I don't think any of us are dissipated like the glutton the Bible condemns, we all need to grow in our walk with God.

That means imposing God's discipline even on our physical lives...

1 Tim 4.8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.

Only a little profit. But not no profit. And the discipline aids the disciplines of godliness.