

LEAD! B.11 From Gluttony to Self-Control

In Which We Deny Our Bodies to Nurture Our Souls

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." -- [Matthew 5:10](#)

While gluttony primarily refers to the excessive consumption of food, here we will define it more broadly as "*seeking to satisfy our souls by indulging the appetites of the flesh.*" This is in contrast to self-control, which is the ability to align the actions of our body with the desires of the spirit.

Importantly, for a Christian self-control is ultimately about being controlled by **God's** Spirit; in fact, God sometimes lets us fall into sins of the flesh to teach us **not** to trust in our own willpower!

This is also why those who undergo persecution are considered "blessed", or "lucky", as it is obvious to them that they can't pursue physical comfort and the kingdom of heaven at the same time.

For the rest of us, alas, the temptation is far more subtle...

Assigned Reading

1. [Peter Kreeft: *Back to Virtue*](#)
 - 13. Courage under Persecution vs. Self-indulgence
2. Dick Hockett: *Foundations of Wisdom*
 - 3.1 (Self-control) Example: Proverbs about the Tongue

Admonition

Read [Proverbs 9](#). What does our choice of food imply about our character?

Bible

[Colossians 2-3](#)

We begin our study of gluttony with Paul's warning against human deception:

[2:8](#) Beware lest anyone [cheat](#) you through [philosophy](#) and [empty deceit](#), according to the [tradition](#) of men, according to the basic [principles](#) of the [world](#), and not according to Christ.

The virtue of self-control presents peculiar dangers to the Christian, since the worldly version naturally leads to a focus on the "self." [C.1] Indeed, many heresies (such as certain forms of [gnosticism](#)) preach self-control an expression of personal divinity, a way for the "pure" human spirit to conquer the "evil" human body.

This may be why Paul emphasizes that Christ was not an immaterial spirit, but a complete flesh-and-blood human being:

⁹For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

And that our goal is **not** to recover our *own* "hidden divinity", but rather to find our fullness in *Him*:

¹⁰and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

To be sure, that completion does involve dying to the "sins of the flesh", so that we can enter into His life of faith:

¹¹In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with [Him] through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

However, this clearly does **not** mean casting off our physical body! Just as *Christ* was raised in the flesh, so too *our* new life is about living out our faith "in the flesh". Our physical bodies aren't the problem -- sin is, and that is why Christ died:

¹³And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

And Christ did not merely triumph over the sins of the flesh, but also those of the spirit world:

¹⁵Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Which is why Paul sternly warns us against getting caught up legalistic arguments about external matters:

¹⁶So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,

Not because they are utterly meaningless, but they distract from what is important [C.2]:

¹⁷which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Crucially, the purpose of self-control is **not** to build up our human self esteem...

¹⁸Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in [false] humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

...but to draw us ever tighter to Christ:

¹⁹and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase [that is] from God.

Alas, the Colossians seem to have lost sight of this, and gotten caught up in rules and regulations about food and cleanliness:

²⁰Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as [though] living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ²¹"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"

Which is focusing on the temporal rather than the eternal:

²²which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men?

And worse, create an illusion of godliness that only masquerades the depths of our sin:

²³These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, [false] humility, and neglect of the body, [but are] of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

The word "religion" is more literally translated as "will-worship", which is the disease underlying legalism. [C.3] This is the real danger of a legalistic approach to self-control: not so much that it denies us valid pleasures, but that it actually strengthens our pride and self-reliance. We strain out the gnats of purely physical sins only to swallow the camel of indulging our rebellious spirits (cf. Matthew 23:24).

So what should we do instead?

^{3:1}If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

This is the Christian approach to self-control: not looking down on our sins, but looking up to our heavenly identity with Christ:

³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

As Ravi Zacharias says, Christ didn't come to make bad people good, but to make dead people live. [C.4] The source of our strength is not ourselves, but Christ -- who is also the only cure for our sin, and our one true hope for glory:

⁴When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

However, that does **not** mean that have no responsibilities of our own:

⁵Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

While it is true we cannot manufacture virtue on our own, there is one thing we can do: put our sins to death by confessing and repenting on them before God. [C.5] This is the part overlooked by those who flee from legalism to licentiousness, forgetting that self-indulgent sin is idolatry, and places us in the path of God's wrath:

⁶Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,

Something we ourselves know all too well:

⁷in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

But should tolerate no longer:

⁸But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

In keeping with our new identity:

⁹Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, ¹⁰and have put on the new [man] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, ¹¹where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave [nor] free, but Christ [is] all and in all.

We are no longer defined by our religion, education, or economic status, but by Christ! The whole point of being saved is to enable us to share in the "name" of Christ, which means it is both a duty and privilege to pursue His character:

¹²Therefore, as [the] elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

[C.6] And when we pursue these as gifts from God rather than achievements of our own flesh, we will express compassion --- rather than condemnation -- for our fellow sinners:

¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also [must do].

Because the greatest sign of Christ-likeness is not taming our own bodies, but showing love to everybody:

¹⁴But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of [perfection](#).

For it is only when we are in Christ, and pursuing heavenly love instead of earthly pleasures, that we know true peace:

¹⁵And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

This is the real solution to gluttony: having the authentic peace of God ruling over our hearts, so we no longer need to drown out the whimpering of our souls through carnal indulgence. In fact, a peace this strong can even rejoice amidst persecution, knowing that our heavenly reward outweighs these "light and momentary afflictions" (cf. [2 Corinthians 4:17](#)).

We will explore the path to peace more fully in the next module, but Paul gives us a pretty good hint in the next verse:

¹⁶Let the [word](#) of Christ dwell in you [richly](#) in all wisdom, [teaching](#) and [admonishing](#) one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, [singing](#) with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

And lest we forget, Paul reminds us that it all [comes back](#) to living our lives in the "name" of Jesus:

¹⁷And [whatever] you do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Will we accept Paul's challenge to fill our hearts with undying gratitude, instead of our stomachs with food that never satisfies?

Conversation

1. Do you think of yourself as a strong-willed person? Is that good or bad?
2. Have you, or a ministry you belonged to, ever gotten bogged down in legalistic disputes? When and why?
3. Describe what you think "will-worship" looks like.
4. Why do you think we often focus on making 'bad people good' instead of helping 'dead people live'?
5. Share a time you had to put part of yourself to death.
6. What does it mean to "put on" the virtues in Colossians 3:12?

Decision

- Repentance: Which of the vices in verses 3:6 and 3:8 do you need to put off?
- Action: Which of the virtues in 3:12–14 will you seek to put on?
- Worship: Sing a psalm, hymn, or spiritual song to God with grace and gratitude in your heart.

Explore More

- [Gluttony – Torrey's Topical Textbook on StudyLight.org](#)
- [Clothe Yourself With Humility « Possessing the Treasure](#)
- [Colossians 3 – Put Off, Put On](#)
- [YouTube – Christafari–Gravity–Colossians 3:16](#)

For Next Week

For next week, read [Philippians 3](#). What is Paul's glory?

References

1. **Blue Letter Bible.** "[Colossians 2](#) – New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–2009. 14 Jan 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?t=NKJV&b=Col&c=2> > **Blue Letter Bible.** "[Colossians 3](#) – New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–2009. 14 Jan 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?t=NKJV&b=Col&c=3> >
2. **New King James Version (NKJV)** Copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)

