

Finding Freedom from Food and Drugs

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The Seven Deadly Sins for Today Series

Romans 1:18-25

We had an absolutely marvelous time last week! I don't recall two better church services in the history of this church. There may have been two better ones, but I just don't remember them. When people are worshipping during the sound check 20 minutes before the service begins, you know something really good is happening. And watching God's Spirit fall upon people is just incredibly profound. We have had reports of several spontaneous healings that took place this past weekend.

What I want to do this evening [morning] is continue in a series I was doing before our grand opening this past weekend on The Seven Deadly Sins. And the Seven Deadly Sins, as I have told you on several occasions, are not found in a list in the Bible, but are found in many, many different writings from leaders in the Christian church over the last 1600 years. The list of Seven Deadly Sins derives from the eastern part of the church – the Eastern Monastic, who spent much time seeking God in solitude. And as they sought God, they became painfully aware of their own frailties and weaknesses. And it seemed to these Eastern monks and to much of the church throughout the history of Christianity that at the foundational level of all of our problems there were seven particular problems that got labeled the Seven Deadly Sins. These formed the trunk of the tree and all of our other sins and perversions were merely branches off of these seven. The Seven Deadly Sins are these: Pride, Envy, Anger, Gluttony, Sloth, Greed and Lust.

Today we are going to talk about the deadly sin of Gluttony. I know this is probably the one particular talk that some of you have been dreading. Some of you have been saying:

“O no, don't talk about gluttony. I have given up so much since I became a Christian. Please don't take my pizza, Rich. I love pizza. Why are you being so mean? I need Graeter's Ice Cream every night. I love those wonderful hunks of chocolate in their Mocha Chip. In fact, I have had a personal relationship with some of those hunks of chocolate. Can't we talk about something else? Do we have to discuss the M&M's in my desk drawer? Let's tackle a different sin today. How about global warming? I promise to give up my aerosol spray can, just don't take away my ice cream or my pizza or my “awesome blossom” fried onion rings.”

The sin of Gluttony. What an odd sin to list among the Seven Deadly Sins. You would think that they would have listed murder or armed robbery, but gluttony? Usually when people hear the word “gluttony” they think of overeating, stuffing yourself, or gorging yourself. Like the newspaper article I read about a man in his 20's who went through the food line at an all-you-can-eat restaurant a few times, actually he went through seven times. They had an all-you-can-eat roast beef bar and he went back for seven

heaping slabs of roast beef, with all the trimmings. This poor fellow ended up in the hospital where he had to have his stomach pumped. The amazing thing is not that there are folks who would go through the food lines at an all-you-can-eat restaurant seven times. Or even that occasionally someone like that might end up in the hospital getting their stomachs pumped. What was truly amazing about this individual in this article was that one week later; it was reported he was back in the roast beef line at the same restaurant.

This is generally what people think of when they think of gluttony. They think of the experience of watching someone or maybe watching yourself at an all-you-can-eat restaurant where you get or you watch someone get eight or nine different plates of food balanced on a small tray. After you have gotten all these different plates of mashed potatoes and fried potatoes and creamed corn and breading and fish sticks and fried chicken and beef and Jell-O and some kind of marshmallow cream stuff and green beans with bacon on top of your marshmallows – after you have done all of that, you go back for 6-7 different kinds of desserts and puddings and a couple of garlic bread sticks to dab into your rice pudding.

I will tell you that gluttony is not merely overeating. It is not simply overindulgence. At least a part of gluttony is a preoccupation and obsession with food and drink and drugs. It is not just overindulgence, but preoccupation – obsession, an inordinate attention to food, drink and drugs.

Do you want to see evidence of gluttony in our culture? Look at the ever expanding list of food and wine magazines. And the amount of shelf space in any bookstore devoted to cookbooks. Amazon.com lists 2341 different titles just of cookbooks. We are talking about the devastation of whole forests, half the Amazon Rain Forest, just to satisfy our obsession with food and drink.

Of course, there is a Cooking for Dummies Cookbook out. I think they sell all of those dummy-type of books in brown paper bag so no one has to see what you are buying. There is even a version called Cooking With Kids for Dummies. I guess the authors feel there is a segment of the population that is so dumb that they can't even instruct little children in making things like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, eggs or hotdogs.

There is a cook book called Aunt Bee's Mayberry Cookbook. I don't know if it occurs to the purchasers of Aunt Bee's Mayberry Cookbook that neither Aunt Bee nor Mayberry actually ever existed. Maybe that doesn't matter to anyone anymore. But getting the recipes from a fictitious town's most famous fictitious cook – well, I don't know.

Then there are all the specialty cookbooks like a cookbook just for chili peppers. A hundred recipes for what to do with red hot chilies. 50 best martini recipes. Recipes just for what you would do with olives and goat cheese. I think my favorite is this title – "How to Cook a Wolf." Boy, that harkens back to the days of our ancestors out on the prairie.

“Honey, what’s for dinner tonight?”

“Well, partner, I got some wolf stew a-simmerin in the oven.”

How to cook a wolf. Boy, there’s a cookbook for when the boss comes over for dinner! Or for impressing your new in-laws.

Of course, correspondingly, if that offends you, you may be in the market for a book called “The Compassionate Cook: Please Don’t Eat the Animals.” I will go with the “How to Cook a Wolf” any day.

Here’s another title I like – “White Trash Cooking.” It should be subtitled, “Favorite Recipes from America’s Trailer Parks.” Can you imagine that? “White Trash Cooking”. Where did they come up with the recipes for this cookbook?

“Excuse me, you seem like white trash, do you have a favorite family recipe?”

Our gluttony is not just found in our over-indulgence, but in our obsession and our preoccupation with food. At any given time between 1 out of 3 and 1 out of 2 American women over the age of 16 is dieting. And many of the diets that women and men find themselves on are fad diets – crash diets designed to burn the weight off you like the high protein diets. Dr. Atkins back in the 1970’s had his first go around with his diet revolution. There was the Scarsdale Medical Diet. Now there are books out on The Zone and protein power. These are just flying out of bookstores. Their idea is that normal healthy diet consists of primarily of bacon fat, lard, and slabs of meat cooked in butter, hunks of cheese and lots and lots of cream. Makes sense to me that a person would eat deep fried pork rinds, but would have to avoid all fruit.

Then there are the liquid diets. These have been around since the 1930’s – buy them in a can, Slim-Fast; drink 5-10 shakes a day. There are variations on the liquid diet. There are juice and broth diets. There is the combining food diet, probably the most famous of which was the Beverly Hills Diet. This woman claimed that certain kinds of mixes of fruit enzymes would flush your calories before they hit your hips. Of course, the fact that there is virtually no scientific evidence that your body processes food combinations differently than random combinations – well, so what.

I remember my mother was on the Grapefruit Diet – a grapefruit for breakfast, a grapefruit for lunch; a grapefruit for dinner – you would lose weight. The monotony of the thing would eventually numb your appetite and you would stop eating. Plus grapefruits are big. Man, you fill your stomach with three large grapefruits a day, there won’t be a lot of room for Hostess’ Ho-Ho’s.

The diet that I like the best is the Cabbage Soup Diet. Some of you who have been into dieting have probably heard of this one. But essentially just eat cabbage soup. You get a big head of cabbage and boil it up with six large onions and some green peppers and tomatoes and that’s all you eat – just cabbage soup. I would have relabeled the cabbage soup diet, “The 17th Century Impoverished Eastern European Diet.” See, one

way to lose weight is to just go back in history and find out what really, really poor people ate when there was no food around. Hey, all you guys ate was cabbage soup – okay.

There is something a little bit unnatural about our current preoccupation with nutritional supplements. There is one ad for something called metaboloicthyeoleon. The ad reads: “It’s not part of my life, it is my life.” I take vitamins and most of my friends take vitamins, but the amount of stuff that folks are taking and the fanaticism and preoccupation with what we ingest, that is what the early church was calling gluttony.

If you want one more demonstration of gluttony, consider what people currently spend to refurbish their kitchens – the kinds of refrigerators and ovens that cost. A basic requirement of any well furnished kitchen has to be the Uno Classic 5850 4-slice toaster. Gone are the days when a person would go to a place like Wal-Mart or Target for a toaster and pay \$25.00. The Uno Classic 5850 4-slice Toaster is a retro toaster in stainless steel. It retails for about \$480. Here is the review of the toaster: [I literally am reading this from their ad]:

“This is not a toaster, this is laboratory equipment. Although this toaster takes up a sizeable chunk of counter space, it is worth the sacrifice just to watch it work. This stainless steel classic is reminiscent of a time before microchips. Big slots, big handles, big toast...”

I mean, come on – laboratory equipment? We are talking after all about making toast. This doesn’t require a degree in chemistry. Light or dark, that’s all we have to figure out. But it is an example of gluttony.

And the way that food is advertised and the amount of obesity in our country, and the number of eating disorders and the misuse of prescription medicine and our addiction to caffeine. I am calling today’s talk, “Finding Freedom from Food and Drugs.” Let’s pray.

Let me share what gluttony is not before we take a look at today’s text. Gluttony is not, listen to me now, gluttony is not enjoying a great meal. Thoroughly enjoying food and drink, I mean really enjoying it, is not gluttony. Enjoying food is gift of God and the Bible condemns asceticism as a doctrine from demons.

The food we eat and enjoy is a gift from God. It is not gluttony to enjoy a great meal. And it is not contributing to gluttony to enjoy preparing a great meal as an act of love to one’s family or guests. Some of you have gifts of hospitality and you are wonderful cooks. You might spend hours lovingly preparing a meal for your guests or family. That is not gluttony. Gluttony is the absence of love. The absence of the warmth of family and friendship. Gluttony is obsession with food for its own sake. Gluttony doesn’t connect you with other people. The scene of gluttony is not sitting around a well-laden table at Christmas or Thanksgiving, laughing and enjoying company. The scene of gluttony is solitary, lonely, shame-producing, devouring of food or drink or drugs that excludes God and others. Gluttony is the misuse of God’s creation. Attempting to gain from food, drug and drink what you were designed to get from God.

Let's take a look at Romans 1:18-25, here is what we read:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

There is a logic here. The NIV very badly translates verse 18. It should begin with “For the wrath of God” not simply “*The* wrath of God,” but “*For* the wrath of God is being revealed.” He connects up verse 18 with what went before it. Paul is linking together his thoughts from verses 18-25, in a series of logical steps. He is using connecting words like “since” or “because” in verse 19. And words like “for” in verse 20 and “therefore” in verse 24.

So let me try to work through Paul's logic. The Book of Romans in particular is a carefully reasoned, carefully thought out, sustained line of logic. Let me work out Paul's logic for you. His first premise is simply that God reveals himself. We find that in verses 19 and 20:

“Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them for since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made.”

God reveals himself in and throughout creation. That is Paul's initial premise. What he starts off with is telling us that the purpose of creation is to point to the Creator. That is the purpose of all creation including food and drink, to be a signpost pointed to God. In other words, Paul is saying that God has left his imprint all over creation. It is like creation is a painting and then across creation God has written the signature of the artist. If you look at a sunset or a baby or you examine a human cell under a microscope or you look at the stars – across the center of God's creation, Paul says, are written these words: An original creation by the Triune God – God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit.

So he says what can be known about God is plain because God has made it plain. There is no problem in God's teaching methods. He is a very clear speaker. He is a

great teacher. He is an excellent communicator. And he is regularly communicating to men and women on this planet through creation.

In other words on the last day no one can say to God, “God, I didn’t know you existed. You didn’t communicate your existence clearly enough. You simply did not give me enough evidence for believing in you. Everything has been so fuzzy. Who possibly could have figured out this great puzzle of your existence or your nature by looking out at creation? Only someone of super human intelligence. God, you can’t hold me responsible because I didn’t have a super computer in my brain.”

Paul is saying it is plain. It is clear. No one on the last day will be able to say to God, “God you are so unfair. You are holding me responsible for knowing what I had no capacity to know --namely your existence, your nature, the fact that you have power and are in control.”

He said: *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

Listen to me. Always remember this: God is a perfectly just and fair God and he never, ever holds people responsible for what they don’t know or had no ability to know. God’s judgment and his standard for judging is always based on the light you have and the truth you know – not the light that you don’t have and the truth you don’t know. So God will never, ever judge someone for not knowing about his Son, whom they have not heard about. When people say, “Well, what about the aborigine living in Australia who has never heard about Jesus? What about the person living in India or in Asia who never heard the Good News about Jesus? God is just. He will never judge someone for not knowing or not hearing about his Son. God judges people according to the light they do have and the truth they do know.

The whole point of this text is found in this last phrase of verse 20, *so that men are without excuse*. We would have a very good excuse before God on the last day if we could say, “Well, God, my problem with your standard of judgment is that I never knew and I never heard.” God is going to say back, “No, I am only going to judge you based on that part of my will that you did know and that part of my truth that you did possess.”

Let me ask you a personal question, friend. Let’s not apply the truth to the aborigine in Australia or the little village girl in India. Let’s apply the truth to you and me. What are you doing with the truth that you do have? In what area of life has God made his will perfectly clear to you and you are still not obeying it? I am not asking in what area are you confused about the will of God? All of us are confused about certain things in our lives. We aren’t sure what God is saying. I am not asking you in what area of your life are you confused about the will of God. I am asking you where are you clear about the will of God, but you are just not obeying him. What do you know about the truth that you aren’t doing? Where are you without excuse as you find yourself in verse 20 where

it says *so that men [and women] are without excuse*? In what way today, brothers and sisters, do you find yourself to be totally without excuse.

Perhaps God has spoken to you about working less and spending more time with your kids or your mate. Have you responded and done what he told you to do? Where are you without excuse? Perhaps God has talked with you about establishing a daily prayer time or Bible reading time, but you still haven't done it. Perhaps God has spoken with you about getting more involved in the church or joining a group, but you still haven't done it. Perhaps the Lord has talked to you about repenting of a certain behavior or maybe reaching out to a very difficult person in your family – someone you have been at odds with for years. But you still haven't made the effort to reconcile. You have been at a distance from a brother or sister in your family or a parent but you haven't reached across the divide. Or maybe it is not healing a relationship, but breaking off a relationship where it is getting between you and God and you know that you need to pick up the phone and talk to another person and say, "I just can't do this anymore." Maybe it is going public with your faith. You have refused repeatedly to acknowledge Christ before other men and women and you need to come out from hiding.

What are you crystal clear about where you can say in your heart of hearts: I know what you are saying to me, God, about ministry, missions, my money, my sexuality, but I just haven't been willing to do it? In other words, where do you need to say, "God, I just give up. My arms are too short to box with you."

Here is Paul's first premise. God reveals himself plainly through his creation to us. So plainly that we are without excuse. But we refuse to acknowledge and submit to God's revelation. Verse 18: *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...* Paul is saying the problem of men and women in the world is not that we don't know the truth, but we don't acknowledge the truth we know. In other words, it is not ignorance of God, it is rather that we don't submit to the God we know.

See, our issue with God is not what we claim it is. Our issue with God is not what we claim it is – intellectual and evidentiary. Our issue with God is almost always moral and willful. We are talking about the college student who argues like crazy with you about why Christians say that Christ is the only way to God when his real problem is that he doesn't want to stop sleeping with his girlfriend. It is not our minds that pose the greatest problem in our relationship with God. It doesn't matter how smart you are, how brilliant you are, how many degrees you have – God is so much smarter than you. It is not your mind that creates the greatest problem, it is your will.

We fallen men and women find God repugnant and we find his will repugnant. It is not that we don't know what God thinks about divorce or forgiving those who have hurt us or giving our money and not hoarding it all up for ourselves, our house and our kitchens. It is not because there are so many knotty intellectual problems. There are problems, by the way, and I believe there are real answers to real questions. But what we are reading here in Romans 1 is that the primary problem of men and women is not with our

brains. It is with our hearts and wills. It is with things like pride, envy, gluttony, greed and lust. That is the stuff that keeps us from God.

Let me put it even more plainly. Paul is saying that even though what is plain about God can be clearly seen, we in our wickedness suppress the truth. Now the average man or woman doesn't think of themselves that way – suppressing the truth, hiding the evidence, shredding the files, manipulating witnesses, suborning perjury. We don't think of ourselves that way. We think of ourselves almost always as an unbiased jury. Here we are in all of our intellectual honesty just really trying to assess the evidence for God fairly like that relief in many courtrooms of Lady Justice. We are like Lady Justice with the blindfold on our eyes, holding the scales of justice in our hands, no respecters of persons, no prejudice – just weighing the evidence and we will come up with our verdict regarding God's will or person

Paul is saying that that is just a bunch of baloney. We the jury are biased in the Case of God verse the World. We are biased, prejudiced, and hostile to God. We are like jury members who have been totally paid off. We come at the evidence with a prejudice.

That's the way I used to approach the evidence regarding God when I was growing up. I didn't think I even needed to seriously entertain it. No one that I knew or respected took God very seriously. If there were other writers or thinkers that thought that the big issue of life was God and his will, well, they never came across my desk. They weren't in my circles, so they were almost by definition, fringe. I didn't have to worry about them. They couldn't possibly be right. We don't have a blindfold on as we are laying out the evidence. We have the blindfold off. We are seeing where God shows up and we are putting our hand on the other side of the balance pan voting repeatedly against the truth of God. We are regularly saying: I don't know what your will is God, when we do know what his will is. We regularly say: I am confused, when we aren't confused. We regularly say: It's not clear, when it is perfectly clear.

We know what is right and what is wrong. We just won't do it. Let's be honest.

And so in our refusal to submit to God's revelation, we end up worshipping the creation rather than the creator. Paul says in verses 22-23: *Although they claim to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.* And verse 25: *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Amen.*

As we suppress the truth about God and creation's purpose, which is to point us upward toward God so that we would honor God and give thanks to God, for our food and drink and medicine. Instead, we look to creation as an end in itself. Creation's purpose is to be a pointer to God, to connect us with God. But instead, we burrow into creation. We dig into created things for meaning and purpose and comfort and control. In fact, a good test about whether you feel O.K. about your use of creation is if you can and do

say with a clear conscience and full heart, thank you God for what I'm about to eat or drink.

Now Paul uses as an example of the way that we worship and give ourselves to the creation rather than the Creator. He uses as an example sexual immorality and our giving of ourselves to lust. But he could have used as an example, I believe, the sin of gluttony. The misuse of creation, the attempt through food, drink and drugs to find in the created stuff what we are designed to only find in God – meaning, a sense of control and comfort.

It is estimated that 15% of the American population suffers from a psychologically diagnosable disordered pattern of eating. Anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorders – about 90% of these are women between the ages of 14-40. And there is another significant part of our population that suffers from eating disorders such as obesity, what is called “over-eating syndrome”.

What is the issue for bulimics or anorexics? Psychologists say that the bulimic who binges and then purges and anorexics who starve themselves are both looking to food to gain control. For the bulimic, the person who binges and purges, the control comes from breaking the rules or getting away with something. Bulimics feel powerful and in control when they can eat whatever they want and not suffer the consequence that they dread, which is getting fat. If you are bulimic, you have felt a high at some point, when you have gotten rid of the thousands of calories you've eaten on a binge. Getting rid of that food is like getting rid of shame.

If you are an anorexic, you take control by saying “no” to food, by controlling your body's need to eat. You are saying to yourself, “At least in this area, I am the one who makes the decisions. I am in control.” Some anorexics find incredible enjoyment in cooking elaborate meals for others. Their ability is to enjoy food through others while refraining from indulging themselves brings up enormous sense of power and control. Rather than submit to the sovereignty and control of God, we seize control.

If you are a compulsive overeater, you may insulate your life from the world and relationships, from rejection, from love, from sex. You may insulate yourself by being over weight. You find that your one faithful friend is food, a substitute for God. This faithful friend who will never leave you or forsake you.

The reason I class anorexia and bulimia along with other kinds of binge eating and overeating and gluttony is because if you ask anyone with an eating disorder: How often do you think about food, if they are honest, they will say “100% of the time.” Food is the dominant and controlling thought. That's gluttony. You look to food to gain control but food actually controls you.

And I believe the same kind of reaching into creation rather than the Creator is happening in a massive gluttonous way with prescription drugs in America right now. I don't know if you have seen any of the TV advertisements. The drug makers in the last

10-15 years have shifted their marketing tactics from physicians to direct marketing to consumers. There is one particularly offensive commercial, sort of a 1950's style cartoon silhouette where they are advertising a mood altering anti-depressant. This woman is sweeping up her various problems that are on the floor – anxiety, fear, loneliness, depression – she is sweeping them up. She has just popped a pill and she is sweeping up these problems into a little dustpan and she drops them in the trash. Then the word “anxiety” comes towards her, she just opens her pocket and it drops right in because she is protected from anxiety by a pill.

There is now a gluttonous over prescription of the drug Ritalin. There have been recent cases of deaths by Ritalin. There was an article recently in the paper about the prescription of Ritalin for 3-4 year olds. I know that parents face enormous pressure if you have an overly active or easily distractible child, typically a boy, but at times a girl – but if you have an overly active, easily distractible child you are going to receive pressure from school teachers and counselors, from lots of literature, from your own family counselor, to go ahead and put your child on Ritalin. If you don't, they will underachieve and not reach their potential. You will hear all the testimonies about it. You may even see some benefit for a time in drugging your child.

You are going to have the same kind of pressure if you are depressed or your spouse is depressed or anxious. Many doctors without the least amount of serious counseling training are simply prescribing Prozac for their depressed or anxious patients. I honestly believe that our love affair in America with mood altering drugs is simply a symptom of gluttony. It is reaching into the creation rather than the Creator for control, for comfort, for help with the issues of our souls and the issues of our families. May I encourage you, if you are at all thinking about putting your child or yourself on some mood altering prescription medicine to seek out a counselor who has a very very conservative and negative view towards drug use and will only recommend drugs in the most unusual and severe of circumstances.

I recognize I may be offending a few. But frankly most other folks are not going to say this to you. Our love affair with prescription drugs is a form of gluttony. We worship the creation rather than the Creator and as a result of our idolatry of creation, God reveals his wrath. Verse 18: *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...* The final judgment, where we stand before God, is simply the process of a culmination of judgments that has been at work since our first parents sinned against God. God's wrath, it says in verse 18, is continually being revealed. It is not “will be revealed in the end” it is being revealed right now.

The way that God reveals his wrath right now, primarily, is by letting us do what we want to do. God's wrath is revealed by not intervening. By letting you have your own way. The worse thing that can happen to you from God is not that God catches you short and pulls the rug out from under your life. That is often a mercy – that you got some kind of a disease, that you got sick, that someone confronted you, that you got found out, that your wife or husband filed for divorce as a result of your adultery – that is often a mercy.

It is an intervention. It is when you get to have your own way the wrath of God is shown in God letting you have your own way saying to you, 'Well, if you insist on that dating relationship, well then go for it.' If you really want that job or the satisfaction or revenge, or the idolatrous use of food or drink or drugs, you can have it.

Most of the time God shows his anger toward sin by not putting the emergency brakes on in our lives. By not intervening. By letting us walk farther and farther out on the limb and away from the tree trunk and by letting us have the affects of our little secret addictions. So we get further and further into bondage.

Here's a little quiz for you. It is taken from a counseling book on eating disorders. The test is called "Are You a Food Addict?" We could cross that out and say, "Are You a Glutton?" The test says 5 or more yes answers strongly suggests the presence of an eating disorder. Here are some questions:

1. Are you intensely afraid of becoming fat?
2. Do you have certain eating rituals, for example, cutting food into tiny bites, eating only certain foods in a certain order at a particular time of day?
3. When you feel hungry, do you usually refrain from eating?
4. Do you often exercise strenuously or for long periods of time even when you are tired or sick?
5. Are you frequently on a very rigid diet?
6. Do you eat in secret? Hide food? Lie about your eating?
7. Do you feel guilt and remorse about your eating behavior?
8. Is it hard for you to stop eating even when you want to?
9. Do you eat to escape problems, to relax, to have fun or to protect yourself against other people?
10. Has anyone expressed concern about your obsession with food?
11. Do you worry that your eating behavior is abnormal?
12. Are you physically suffering as a result of your relationship to food?

There may be many of us who are today experiencing the affects of our idolatry of creation rather than our worship and service of the Creator.

But Paul gives us good news. See, verse 18, the wrath of God, begins with a "for", *For the wrath of God is being revealed*. The apostle Paul is linking up our problem with the solution that he offered in verse 16, *I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*. Why is Paul not ashamed of the gospel? Because it provides the answer for the problem of living under God's wrath and increasingly getting us into bondage to food, drug and drink. What is the answer? The answer is the gospel, which offers us salvation.

Now, if the word salvation is a little religious for you, you can translate it in your mind to "freedom." Jesus Christ came as the great Liberator. His mission was to set people free. In his inaugural address, in terms of his reign, he said, This is what I am going to

do in my reign. *The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, the recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.*”

Jesus Christ came to set us free from our bondages. Today we are talking about our bondage to gluttony, to food, to drink, to drugs. This is why the apostle Paul said: I am not ashamed of the gospel because it offers freedom. He loved the freedom that Christ came to bring. Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 3: *Where the Spirit of God is there the heart is set free.*

FF Bruce, an English Bible scholar, who spent 50 years of his life studying the letters of Paul, summed up Paul's whole career this way. He said that Paul was the apostle of the heart set free. How does Jesus set us free? We come to Christ. He frees us from the penalty of our sins. On the judgment day we will not have to face a wrathful God because the penalty for our sins has been poured out upon Jesus Christ.

But if you have come to Christ, he also is in the business of setting you free from the power of sin in your life. But there's the catch friend, there is no other way to break the addiction to food, drink, drugs or any other addiction other than to suffer for a period of time. The alcoholic has to go through the shakes. The heroine addict has to go through the sweats. The person with an eating disorder has to suffer for a period of time. This is the way to freedom. Depravation. The Bible calls the depravation that breaks us out of slavery “the desert.”

In the history of Israel, we have an example of the way God brings people into complete freedom. We have in the history of Israel, first of all, a people who were enslaved and in bondage to Egypt. And the Lord's intention was to deliver those people out of bondage, out of slavery, and to bring them fully into the promised land. But they don't go to the Promised Land first. Before they go to the Promised Land, they have to be taken into the desert, into the wilderness, for a long period of time.

Why does God take the children of Israel into the desert? He does that to purify them, to refine them, to show them in their own beings how much enslavement, how much of Egypt, was still in them. Even though they left Egypt, Egypt was in them. And what was going on in the desert for the people of Israel was they continually said, “We want Egypt. We want Egypt. We want Egypt.”

You can be taken out of Egypt by getting saved, but it takes a long time for Egypt to get out of you. You can be saved and taken out of the world, but it takes a long time for the world to be taken out of you. And so while we are set free, in a sense, when we are saved, if you really want to be released from gluttony, from bondage to food, drink and drugs, there is a desert experience that awaits you before you enter the Promised Land.

All of the words that the Bible uses to talk about how we get free are words of depravation. They are words of negation. They are words of cutting – refining, pruning, and purifying. All the practices God uses to get us to stop being gluttons are all things that hurt. The truth is we don't like God's processes. We say we want to be free. But

what we mean is we want to be free, God, without pain. We want to be free from our eating disorders without deprivation. We want to be free without having to go through the desert. We want to be free, but not gain weight. We want to be free, but not feel depressed or anxious or face the real problems in our lives or marriages. We want to be instantly free, that's what we mean. We want to be easily free. We want to be painlessly free. Free us, just don't hurt us in the process.

But this is the process – before the Promise Land we go through the desert. You say you want to be free from gluttony? The Bible would say are you willing to suffer deprivation for a period of time? Are you willing to suffer the exposure of your addiction to another person? Are you willing to have your will detached from the object of your desire so that it can be reattached to God? Are you willing to stop being attached to the creation long enough that you can learn how to get re-attached to your Creator?

We have some groups in the church for eating disorders. Some of you may want to pull a card from our lobby table. We have a Weigh Down Workshop that can teach you how to approach food in a healthy way and how to grow in your relationship with God. We have peer counseling available for one on one counseling. We have professional counseling available, if you have an eating disorder or substance abuse disorder that is out of control.

Do you want to be free? Do you really want to be saved? You can't answer "yes, but don't let me hurt." You have to say "yes, even if it takes a while in the desert. I want to finally begin to experience what I have been missing for so long – the blessing and favor of God in my life without my idols and without a bunch of "God substitutes." That's what God wants to give you – his blessing and favor. Let's pray.