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# How Should We Then Live (Part 2)

## 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 – Principles Applied in Wisdom to Eating and Exercising

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### Introduction

This past week I travelled for business and found myself on and off planes frequently. Many of you have flown and some of you fly quite regularly. So you'll know that there is this certain altitude, somewhere between 2,000 and 5,000 feet (it took me quite a bit of messing around with Google Earth to figure that out) at which the view of the surface of the Earth is really quite intriguing. You're not so high that the only the largest features stand out, like mountains and large bodies of water, but not so close that you can't get the big picture and see the where fields are divided, how roads are laid out, where waterways go, where high schools are, where very large estates are... etc. From this altitude, there is enough detail for everything to seem interesting and inviting, but also enough distance for everything to seem so well-laid out and clearly demarcated. At those moments I could trick myself into thinking that we are such a neat and tidy bunch of people living here on this planet... happy, carefree, civil, and sanitary.

This is how some of us interact with the Word and God's people: at a distance of 2,000 to 5,000 feet. Nothing is messy or complicated. We are happy to cruise in the atmosphere, never taking the risk of actually landing the plane. We keep a safe distance. We can talk like we know a lot about what is going on on the ground, but we really don't. If such a person is a true believer, usually one of two things happens – God sends a storm that tears the wings off of the airplane OR in time, the individual, comes to see that life is to be lived in the mess of where the gospel meets life – in all of its sin and glory.

Tonight's sermon is taking place at an altitude of about 6 feet and 1 inch. It is right in the thick of the gospel's invasion into every nook and cranny of the believer's life. If you are on the plane, you are going to think that this sermon is ridiculously intrusive and will likely take the plane to a yet higher altitude. If you are on the ground, you may wince but you will recognize and rejoice in the beauty of our Savior when he says, *It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*<sup>1</sup>

### Getting Oriented

As we get started tonight, there are several important points I'd like to mention that will serve to orient us well. First, I think we would all acknowledge that our bodies are important simply because they allow us to interface with our reality. In a very real sense, our bodies are the only way that what is in our hearts can be displayed to others. They are the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 2:17, NASB

means through which either our visible sins or our visible obedience take place. This, however, is not the whole story. Our bodies have an even greater significance. They are not simply “shells” that we use to get our work done in the material world. As we established this morning, your body has a significance that is greater than simple mechanism for interface with the world. Our bodies have been redeemed. Thus there are two realities functioning side by side: First, what we do with our body is always a visible expression of our hearts *and*, second, simultaneously, there is the reality that our bodies have been redeemed through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, giving our bodies value beyond their function in this world. Based on these truths, we reject the dualism that says our bodies have nothing to do with our spiritual lives. They do. Of all the areas we could focus on that concern our bodies (sickness and suffering, addictions, tattoos, sexuality, etc.), we will focus this evening on health, and two areas in particular: eating and exercise.

So secondly, we should note that while the Bible does *occasionally* directly address issues related to our physical health (and hence our bodies), such issues are not the focus of the Bible. Many have tried to make the Bible a text for physical health, but they are missing the mark and we should be wary of all such attempts. For the most part, we are operating in the realm of wisdom. Since we have established from the Word that our bodies have significant spiritual value and are part of who we are – we can take the principles found in Scripture for holy living and carefully apply them through wisdom to our bodies, indeed, ourselves.

Finally, many of you know that Beth and I trend a little in the healthy direction. We try to exercise regularly (though with mixed success) and we give attention to what we eat. I want to be careful to emphasize, with exertion, that this message is not about living like we do. It is about applying the wisdom of the living Word to our lives. To the extent that our personal examples can be any help, great. But be careful to note, that we don’t represent “the” way to live in this area. We are simply saints working, along with all of you, to bring God glory with our bodies by stewarding them well. [Let’s Pray].

## **The Role of Wisdom and a Preliminary Approach to the Question of Health**

I will admit up front that what Pastor Dale and I decided to bite off at the beginning of this 4-sermon series is far more than we could chew. Dale probably mentioned it and I will repeat it, we could easily be doing a 4-month series on this topic – partially because it is a complex area of study and partially because it is so rarely addressed in the church that all the teaching has to be done from “the ground up,” so to say. With that said I will probably leave you with many questions. Our overview may feel shallow and incomplete – and to a great degree, it is. You will likely feel like I have barely touched these area. So please consider what we do this evening as a work in progress. One that we as a body will need to continue to work out together.

The way I have decided to approach my task this evening is intentionally intended to mirror how issues about eating and exercise often confront us. And, for that matter, how many wisdom issues confront us – that is, from the context of real life we are pushed toward the

Scripture to see what principles apply to a given situation. This is as opposed to what we regularly (and rightfully) do at the Chapel, which is start with the Scriptures and allow them to push their way into life.

Hence, we'll talk about two major questions that many of us, I suspect, encounter in our day to day lives: How do I know if I am eating too much, too little, or just right? And, How do I know if I am exercising too much, too little, or just right?

One broad category of obedience that we will refer to regularly this evening is the biblical concept of stewardship. For our purposes tonight, I want to give you a brief definition of stewardship<sup>2</sup> as *consciously optimizing our resources for the maximization of God's glory and kingdom*. We can say it even more simply: *making the most of our resources to make the most of God's glory*. If that is a new way of thinking about stewardship for you, then I assume the financial conservatives have gotten to you before the Bible has and I recommend you look into that, a few starting places are available in the footnotes. In addition, we will refer frequently to the principles we identified this morning from 1 Corinthians 6:

- You are not your own... So glorify God in your body.
- In exercising your freedom as a believer, do not become enslaved to anything but Christ.
- Use your body to benefit, not harm, God's people.
- What you do with your body, you do with Jesus.

So with our Bibles in hand, let's begin, as a community of believers, to think over these questions together.

## How Do I Know If I Am Eating Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right?

Eating. What a phenomenal topic in the Bible. God has packed so much meaning into this everyday activity. Although we are going to focus only on one small aspect – eating as it pertains to bodily health – know that this is far from the entire story and I commend to you more study in this area. A great place to start would be with a book titled *A Meal with Jesus*<sup>3</sup> by Tim Chester.

### Overeating

Why is this so infrequently talked about from the pulpit? I had to wrestle with this question as I wrote this sermon. Being overweight or obese, in and of itself is not identified in the Bible as a sin. In fact, you could be a thin glutton and be as sinful as an overweight glutton. What is prohibited in the Bible however, are those sins that nine times out of 10 explain why someone is overweight – gluttony, lack of self-control, being mastered by food, etc. And, unlike most other sins, there is no way to hide the impact of these sins. Like many other Christians with many other sins, believers that are

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:16-21, Luke 12: 13-21, Luke 12:41-48, Matthew 19:16-22, Matthew 25:14-30,

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.amazon.com/Meal-Jesus-Discovering-Community-Mission/dp/1433521369/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1345201881&sr=8-1&keywords=a+meal+with+jesus](http://www.amazon.com/Meal-Jesus-Discovering-Community-Mission/dp/1433521369/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1345201881&sr=8-1&keywords=a+meal+with+jesus)

overweight struggle mightily with the sins that lead to being overweight. But it is much harder for them to hide it. Therefore, it is very socially awkward to bring it up. And I suspect this what leads to much of our functional dualism as Christians... that is, acting like what we do with our bodies in this area of eating does not relate to our spiritual lives. We deny to ourselves and others in a “day to day” kind of way that our weight is a result of our sin and foolishness because it visible. Hence, it feels risky for me to give this sermon and perhaps uncomfortable for you to hear it. So I want to reiterate what I said this morning about offense...

Are you eating too much? Let’s begin there. There is no reason to complicate the answer unnecessarily. For many of us, reaching a correct conclusion is not difficult. One third of all adults in the U.S. are obese. Another one-third are overweight. One third of children and teenagers are overweight or obese (and that number is climbing rapidly). We know that excessive weight significantly increases your risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and heart attack, high cholesterol, stroke, a number of cancers, and premature death. In fact, obesity is the second leading cause of preventable deaths in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Now I just mentioned a really important word: *preventable*. If being overweight is preventable, then there must be some causes of being overweight that we have control over. While your genetics, metabolism, culture, existing medical conditions, and environment do play some role, they are not determinative. Being overweight has mostly to do with what we call the “Caloric Balance Equation.” Though the word “equation” is in that phrase, it is not complex to understand. People become overweight because they eat more than what they need. More calories are going in than are going out.

So, as Christians, how do we begin to think about this? Thinking back to the principles we identified this morning, I think there are some fairly clear observations we can make together. Remember that the overarching principle was *You are not your own... So glorify God in your body*. So here is a question: Do we glorify God in our body when we “waste our own body” by allowing ourselves to be given to eating? No. And this is the technical definition for what the Bible calls Gluttony. Proverbs 21:20-21 says, *Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags*. In 1 Samuel we see gluttony ruin Eli’s leadership as he allows his sons to steal the best cuts of meat from the temple so that he could eat them. A sin which eventually figures into his death as the author notes that when Eli fell over backward in his chair, *he died, for the man was old and heavy*.<sup>5</sup>

It is probably true that gluttony rarely occurs alone as a sin and is often part of a larger constellation of sins. So, what else can cause one to be overweight? Let’s consider a

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<sup>4</sup> For trustworthy information, see <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/obesity/facts.htm> and <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/adult/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 1-4

few of our “minor principles” from 1 Corinthians 6. *In exercising your freedom as a believer, do not become enslaved to anything but Christ.* Overeating can be caused by a believer allowing their bodies to be controlled by their desire for food. Thus we see that, gluttony and drunkenness almost always go together in the Bible. Why? Because both represent a lack of self-control, which is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and commanded many places in the Scriptures. Both giving oneself to and allowing oneself to be mastered by something other than the Holy Spirit is sin. Failing to be self-controlled is sin.

Being obese and overweight can undoubtedly be caused by many other sins and immaturity. Some overeat because they are anxious and turn to food instead of Christ. Others overeat because they are bored for lack of full engagement in all that God has called them to. And undoubtedly, for some, overeating is related to a kind of foolishness and ignorance that has yet to be displaced by Bible teaching and wisdom for practical living. That is, some simply do not see their weight, or the habits that have led to it, as a problem. And the list could go on.

Another minor principle we considered was *use your body to benefit, not harm, God’s people.* The sins that lead to being overweight have other longer term consequences, many of which negatively impact other believers. If a believer is quickly out of breath, has difficulty bending over, or develops a heart condition as a result of being overweight – there are going to be certain ministries that they will not be able to participate effectively in. And without question, being overweight *will eventually* affect one’s ability to meet their ministry obligations in their own homes. I don’t feel there is a strong need to spell this all out in detail – but if you take some time to seriously consider the effects of too much weight, and the consequent health problems it can lead to, I think you will begin to see quickly the real and significant impact it has across all aspects of life.

Two things before we move on. First, you may be thinking, “What about those believers who are overweight but it has nothing to do with sin?” Beloved, unless science reveals something new to us, there are very, very, very few of these people. The main and most significant cause of being overweight is more calories in than calories out. Do other factors matter? Yes, they do. But none so much as the Caloric Balance Equation. Obesity and being overweight is a preventable condition. Second, what is an overweight believer to do? The beauty of this question is that the Bible gives an abundant answer that the majority of you already know. Repent of those sins which are causing your overweight or obese status. Note, I did not say repent of being overweight or obese, that is not the issue. The *sins* that cause these conditions are the issue. As with all sins which have been deeply habituated into our lives, repentance will require full reliance on the gospel as it produces an aggressive and spirited fight in us to put to death our sin. Heart change and habit change will be necessary. Grace for change is available to believers in this area of struggle as it is in all areas of struggle.

## Under-eating

Let's move to the other end of the spectrum. Under-eating. In its medical form, when severe enough, this might be called anorexia or bulimia.<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that 1 in 200 women between the ages of 15 and 24 suffers from anorexia and 1 in 50 is bulimic. Between 10 and 50 percent of American college women are reported to have binged and vomited to control their weight. Of all the mental health disorders out there (schizophrenia, depression, bipolar, etc.), eating disorders are responsible for the highest rate of premature deaths.

Of course, long before someone arrives medically at the diagnosis of an eating disorder, there is a long trail of wrong thinking, wrong wanting, and wrong behaving that is leading up to it. Ideally, this is where intervention occurs: Teaching boys and girls, men and women, a biblical view of their bodies, of beauty, of stewardship and what wise living looks like downstream from these areas of biblical truth. In the absence of such teaching, however, the world fills in with its own signals and "truths," many of which are in direct contradiction to what God has said.

Unlike being overweight, these areas of sin and struggle are much easier to hide and the causes much more difficult to disentangle. That is, the constellation of sins and foolishness can be as varied as the people themselves who struggle in this area. Thus we must always take time to sort out what is going on in the heart of a believer who struggles with these sins versus making blanket assumptions. Undoubtedly, for some, the core issues are related to pride, for others a failure to trust in God through suffering and hardship, and for others a rejection of God's design and creation, et cetera.

Elyse Fitzpatrick<sup>7</sup> has helpfully provided one biblical analysis of what happens with eating disorders when they begin to function as entire religious systems unto themselves – a sort of legalism. A certain body image becomes a little "g" god. That God has certain rules and demands, including foods that are okay and foods that are off limits. As laws tend to do, the desire for that which is prohibited by the law is increased. When the "worshipper" violates the law, say by eating an inordinate amount of a certain kind of food in a short amount of time, there is guilt and shame. In order to satisfy the demands of their god whom they have now sinned against, a person may cause themselves to throw up or to exercise excessively or to stop eating altogether. Payment for the sin has been rendered and the cycle begins again. This is just one sin motif that can occur.

We can put this into very accessible terms. A junior high girl buys into the image that the world has told her is the "ideal" body shape, dress size, or appearance. She begins to notice as her body changes that God has not put her together the way that she wants. She craves the kind of attention that kind of body can win her. She determines to do whatever is necessary to achieve a certain "look." Other girls (and boys) may feed

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<sup>6</sup> <http://health.usnews.com/health-conditions/mental-health/eating-disorders>

<sup>7</sup> see *Women Helping Women* by Fitzpatrick and Cornish; *Love to Eat, Hate to Eat* by Elyse Fitzpatrick

into this by subtly (or not) by making her aware that her body type is not what the world has chosen to prize in this generation. She begins to take small steps to “master” her body by abusing it into a shape that is not natural for her – rejecting God’s design, creativity, and wisdom.

Is she glorifying God with her body? No. She is attempting to glorify herself – she has utterly forgotten that her body is not her own and that she does not have the right to abuse it. Is she serving other believers well? No. By abusing her body she is negatively affecting her health which compromises her ability to serve in the short and possibly long-term. Is she remembering that her body has been redeemed and that she is now in union with Christ? No. She has forgotten that every time she goes to the bathroom to purge, Jesus is with her and she is using the body he died for to accomplish her own self-centered ends by causing her body to reverse its natural functions. Can she be freed from these sins? YES.

Excessive limiting of food intake or reversing the body’s function for the purpose selfish and self-centered reasons does not please the Lord. As with overeating, under-eating is most often driven by sin and foolishness. That is good news. Because it means there is hope. For the believer, there is grace abounding for repentance and change.

How we care for something is a strong indicator of how we value it. If I were to give Beth, my wife, a \$10,000 string of pearls (a price that would be a great cost for us) and she let our 3-year old swing them around, our 1-year old suck on them, and she put them through the wash accidentally, never cleaned them or had them serviced, and finally used them as a tie to keep a bouquet of flowers together... there is a pretty good chance I would be very offended. Similarly, when we fail to care for our bodies by overeating, under-eating, or other poor practices, we demonstrate that we value little our bodies, for which Christ died. Does that make sense? So if overeating is wrong and under-eating is wrong. What is a biblical approach to eating?

### **Stewardship as a Principle for Decision Making**

In both overeating and under-eating, remembering the concept of stewardship will serve us well as believers. Though we don’t have time to unpack this idea at length, I think that even a brief consideration may be helpful. Our working definition of stewardship is *optimizing our resources for the maximization of God’s glory and kingdom*. When we apply the principle of stewardship to our bodies, questions and answers begin to form. Should I eat that second burger? Should I force my body to throw up the doughnut I had at breakfast? Should I have that bowl of ice cream before bed? Should I exercise two hours today because my mom described me as “big-boned” to a friend she was talking to yesterday? Ask this question: Which choice – both in the short and the long term – will optimize your resources for God’s glory and kingdom? To go through this thinking process takes time, energy, and lots of wisdom, but this is worth it because it provides us with the opportunity to create more glory for our God and more good for his kingdom and it focuses us on “right” concerns.

Burger? Doughnut? Ice cream? Two hours of exercise. The answer to each question depends on a host of circumstances and heart motivations. The better you know and understand the Word, the better able you will be to make God-pleasing decisions. Romans 12:1-3 reflects this interactive pattern. It says, *...present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Before we move on, let's take the matter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> burger... if you are 75 pounds overweight, eating at home, have already had two meals today and are getting ready to watch TV for the evening... what would glorify God? It is his body – but your choice. If you are 14 year old girl at a sleep over having a blast with your friends and you are generally healthy (and still hungry!)– keep the party rolling, have another burger. Glorify God by trusting his creativity and goodness in how he has put your body together. If you are a 45 year-old male 10 or 15 pounds overweight and you've taken your teenage son out for a burger to discuss his physical relationship with a new girlfriend and you can tell that to keep this conversation going you both are going to need to keep eating – by all means, order another burger and bring God glory by sacrificing your eating goals to serve your son well. Trust God to give you time to exercise over the weekend. Stewardship is dynamic. Wisdom is dynamic. The “renewal of our mind” which takes place through the ministry of the Word and the Spirit, will give us the discernment necessary to understand the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God in each situation.

## **How Do I know If I Am Exercising Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right?**

So let's transition to exercise. We will not spend nearly as much time here – partially because our time is running out and partially because the process of thinking through this issue is very similar to eating. Let's start with over-exercise.

### **Over-exercise**

When thinking about exercise, we have a key question to confront: Why? Why am I exercising? This is different than eating, which is a necessity. Exercise is often an elective activity... hence the motives of the heart become even more important. Am I exercising to bring God glory through my body? Or am I exercising for some other reason? There are many good, godly, reasons to be exercising. Perhaps you lead a largely sedentary lifestyle (which is true for most adults) and you want to burn additional calories to reduce or maintain your weight. Perhaps you are aging and want to keep muscles tone and joints mobile so that you can get down on the floor with grandchildren. Perhaps you are looking to keep yourself looking slim and trim for your wife as a way of honoring and caring for her. Perhaps exercise is a good way for you to burn off anxiety and stress. Perhaps you exercise so that you can fulfill your role as a member of an athletic team. All reasons that can be linked to God's glory.



But, there are a host of other reasons whereby one may engage in exercise for all the wrong reasons. Reasons that do not have God's glory and kingdom at the center of their motivation. Many young men decide to pursue body building. If we are frank, we can safely say that this is often more accurately described as ego-building. You want people, especially girls, to look at you and think about how big your muscles are. When you take your shirt off you want people to be stunned. *Your* glory is at the center of this. Conversely, you may exercise not for external strokes to your pride, but for internal ones. You are always pursuing your personal best so that you can feel good about you. In control and powerful. Again, potentially more about your glory than God's. Nike has masterfully inspired generations of young people to believing deeply in their personal capacity, self-actualization, and physical domination. At the center of each of these ideas is oneself. Perhaps you exercise as a way of bargaining with God. If I do everything I can to maximize my health, I won't get sick or get diseases or get old because God will see my hard work and honor it. Others might exercise to avoid people, problems and life. If I am always at the gym, I can effectively avoid the trial and temptation God has placed in my life.

So how can you know if you are exercising too much? Here are a few practical questions to ask yourself and get the wisdom process started. *Why are you exercising?* Take time to search out your heart and think it through. What is the first thing you do or think when you finish an exercise session? Are you upset when you are hindered from your regular workout? What are you willing to skip in order to get your workout in? Do you prioritize your exercise over your God-given obligations? How would you feel if you were suddenly unable to exercise? If you are injured, do you have a hard time waiting until your healed before returning to exercise? Do you look down on those who do not exercise or exercise less? Is the very worst thing you can imagine happening the loss of your health or physical ability?

All of these questions, and many more, expose our hearts and expose our views of our body. Again, if we ask the kinds of questions that stem from our consideration of 1 Corinthians 6 (Your body is not your own... glorify God with your body, are you using your body in a way that helps or harms the other believers? Are you allowing your body to be mastered by things other than the Holy Spirit? Are you remembering that everything you do with your body you are doing with a body that has been purchased by and joined with Christ?) a firm foundation for making decisions about exercise will begin to fall in place.

### **Under-exercising**

Finally, we can ask about exercising too little. You should already be able to process through this biblically with some of the principles we've identified. So let's just hit a few highlights. First, the Bible clearly identifies a sin that is a frequent deterrent to exercise – laziness or sloth. Ecclesiastes 10:18 says, *Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.* Proverbs 6:6-11 reminds us, *Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest. How long will you lie there, O*

*sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.* Sloth has consequences in the physical world, sloth has consequences for your physical body. It can lead to a body that is less useful than it would otherwise be for God's kingdom and glory. Staying active is good because it generally allows your body to be in a condition that is going to be more versatile and available for the work of pleasing God over the long-haul. It also demonstrates your care for the body God has purchased.

In the area of exercise, as in eating, considering biblical stewardship can help us think through some of the subtle or complex situations that come in life. What level of exercise, if any, will bring God the most glory in this particular phase or situation in life? We must repent of sins related to the lack of, or excess of, exercise and God will grant us wisdom for this.

Let's conclude with a few closing thoughts. First, the main purpose of this sermon is to begin to *raise our awareness* of God's view of our body. An area that many of us have not given much thought to. If you are thinking about your body more biblically now than when this series began, then we have accomplished our goal.

## Conclusion

The intent is not to make you skinny, strong, agile, fit, or a ripe old age before you die. The goal is for you to regard and engage your body according the principles in God's Word. The series is merely a first step.

Second, we have left many questions unanswered. We fully acknowledge this. Please bring your questions to us, to your flock pastors, to other believers. Perhaps we will be able to return to this topic in the near future from the pulpit.

Third, please think carefully about your current use of your body. There may be patterns of sin which require repentance and change. Christians think and believe about their bodies differently than the world – mainly, because we understand they are not our own and we are to bring God glory through them. As we mature spiritually, the effect will be visible physically. We will repent from sinful patterns and our bodies will be used to bring God glory. Though this will *look* very differently for every believer, it will not *sound* very differently. This is because we are all working out of the same Book, allowing the same principles to shape wisdom for daily living; asking God to show us how to maximize the treatment and use of our bodies for his glory. [Let's Pray]