



Dear Phil

IS OBESITY SIN?

As I was reading your last article, “Is it wrong to break the speed limit,” I couldn’t help but think of some other subjects the Bible speaks of, but no one ever speaks on. Is obesity sin? Is being overweight defiling the body? —David

Dear David,

What does the Bible say? *First, it tells us that we should enjoy eating and drinking (Eccl. 3:13). God made all things for us to enjoy richly (1 Tim. 6:17) and that includes food (Gen. 2:9; 9:3). In fact, God compares salvation to the delights of eating and drinking from an abundant supply (Isa. 55:1-2).*

Second, the Bible tells us that whatever we do, including eating and drinking, we must do it to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Even in our eating and drinking we are to conduct ourselves in a way that reflects the unique excellence of God’s character. Since God is balanced, proportionate, and self-controlled, we should ask ourselves, “Does the way I eat and drink reflect God’s characteristics of balance, proportion, and self-control?”

Third, the Bible lists among the works of the flesh two specific

*items that relate to eating and drinking: “drunkenness and revellings” (Gal. 5:21). Both of these sins are sins of excess. We all know what drunkenness is, but “revellings” is not so well known. The word translated “revellings” or carousing is *komoj*, and according to the most recent edition of BDAG (the premier NT Greek lexicon) means “excessive feasting.” An alternate definition given by Louw & Nida is “drinking parties involving unrestrained indulgence in alcoholic beverages and accompanying immoral behavior—‘orgy, revelling, carousing.’”*

Whether these two words apply only to drunken behavior or include eating as well is not entirely clear. However, notice how Paul concludes his list of the sins of the flesh with the words “and the like.” Paul has not listed all the sins that the flesh is capable of—only representative sins. And he expects us to be able to identify other behaviors that would be sins of the flesh and contrary to the fruit of the Spirit. The last item Paul lists as a fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Gal. 5:23). Clearly, eating and drinking in a self-indulgent manner is a work of the flesh, not a fruit of the Spirit, and is sinful.

Lastly, the Bible tells us that our bodies are not our own to do with what we please, but they are temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we are to glorify God by taking care of our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Earlier in this chapter, Paul tells us that food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but we should not do anything with our bodies that is not profitable to us or causes us to be addicted (1 Cor. 6:12-13).

You asked, “Is being overweight defiling the body?” The term “overweight” is problematic. Who determines how much any given person should weigh? The Bible does not address weight to body-size ratios, but it does tell us that Christians must do the best

they know how to take care of their bodies which are the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20; see also 1 Tim. 5:23; 4:8). Further, Christians should evidence the Spirit’s fruit of self-control in all areas of their lives, including how they eat.

Eating without self-control, eating that damages your body, eating that fails to glorify God or being addicted to eating or to certain foods—all these are contrary to God’s Word and sinful for precisely the same reasons that using tobacco has been judged contrary to God’s Word and sinful. As the newspaper clipping you enclosed indicates, “Obesity [is] closing in on tobacco as the nation’s No. 1 underlying preventable killer.” If we knowingly indulge our appetites in such a way that damages our bodies, we are harming the temple of the Holy Spirit. (By the way, 1 Cor. 3:16-17 should not be used in this discussion since, contextually, the passage refers to the corporate body of Christ, rather than to our physical bodies.)

Please don’t misunderstand me. I know that there are medical conditions that can cause people to be obese apart from overeating; and, therefore, it would be wrong to assume automatically that anyone who is obese is guilty of sin. However, many Christians have falsely concluded that God doesn’t really care about how much they eat or how they treat His temple. In fact, He does care, and if they would submit their eating habits to the control of the Holy Spirit, they would find that He would guide them into the fruit of self-control in this area as He does in other areas of life.

Sincerely,
Philip Brown ■

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