



Dear Phil

**MORE ON OBESITY:
THE SINS OF THE FATHERS**

I applaud your valiant effort in addressing an issue long neglected by the people in the holiness movement. We are quick to condemn many of the deadly sins but tread lightly on the issues of our health and how we care for our body. I would encourage you to pursue this matter, giving special attention to the concept of the “sins of the fathers being visited on the children and their children’s children” as it relates to obesity of parents and their children.

I share my thoughts to encourage you to continue this discussion. As a brother in Christ with a common heritage of faith, we must be people of love and integrity.

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Dear Russell,

Thanks so much for taking the time to write. Your letter provides me an opportunity to clarify something I wrote in my column “Is Obesity Sin?” I said, “There are medical conditions that can cause people to be obese apart from over-eating.” I have since learned that there are few medical conditions that actually cause obesi-

ty. It is usually a combination of a medical condition plus a failure to eat properly that causes obesity. One of the most common medical conditions associated with obesity, hypothyroidism, involves a slowdown in the body’s metabolic rate. In addition to obtaining medical treatment, if people with this condition do not adjust their diet to a balanced, low-calorie intake, they can become obese. Since the fruit of the Spirit is self-control, a Spirit-led life will make whatever adjustments are necessary to balance intake with the body’s true needs.

In response to your suggestion regarding “the sins of the fathers being visited upon their children to the third and fourth generation” (Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18; Deut. 5:9), we might ask, “How does parental self-indulgence affect children?” I answer: (1) a broad spectrum of scientific research confirms that children may inherit a physiological predisposition to be obese expressed in unusual appetite or slower metabolism. In the spiritual dimension, children may inherit tendencies to self-indulgence. As a result of their genetic heritage, such children will face greater temptation in this area than they would otherwise; (2) children are strongly influenced by their home environment. If self-indulgence is “normal” in their home, their parents are training them to view the sin of self-indulgence as acceptable. In each of these cases, parents will have to answer to God for their influence on their children.

I recently read the following statement on the American Obesity Association’s website: “Obesity is not a simple condition of eating too much. It is now recognized that obesity is a serious, chronic disease.” I can hardly think of a better example of humanistic thinking. I’ll never forget the parishioner who told me that he was suffering from the disease of alcoholism. Neither alcoholism nor obesity are diseases in the same sense as multiple sclerosis or diabetes. Alcoholism and most cases of obesity are symptoms of a spiritual disease of the soul. The real problem with both is a lifestyle of self-indulgence. Sadly, many believers are committing the sin of gluttony in regard to their eating habits, though I sincerely hope

it is through ignorance. Yet ignorance is not bliss: whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap—even if he sows ignorantly (Gal. 6:7-8; cf. Prov. 23:21).

For those who are ensnared by this sin, there is hope. God has given us two primary means of grace to overcome sinful habits: *the purifying, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, and the encouragement of the Body of Christ.* If you have been excusing self-indulgence, the first step to deliverance is repentance. Ask God to forgive you and purpose by His grace to be self-controlled. The second step is total, unconditional surrender to the controlling presence of the Holy Spirit. If you will live moment-by-moment under the Spirit’s control, He will empower you to deny yourself food for the joy of glorifying Him in all things (1 Cor. 10:31). Two practical questions you might ask are “Am I walking in full harmony with the Spirit in my eating today? Am I exhibiting the Spirit’s fruit of self-control in what I’m putting on my plate?” The third step is to make yourself accountable to other mature believers. God never intended for His people to be spiritual Lone Rangers. We all need the encouragement and potential rebuke that those who truly love us will provide.

That thought leads me, in conclusion, to challenge all my readers to give heed to Hebrews 3:13, “but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Godly love for one another will neither allow us to pass off self-indulgence with a glib “We all have our struggles” nor condemn those in its snares with an unfeeling “It’s their own fault.” Godly love will motivate us to compassionate prayer, gentle exhortation, and willing involvement in helping our brothers and sisters live for His glory in all things.

Sincerely,
Philip Brown ■

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