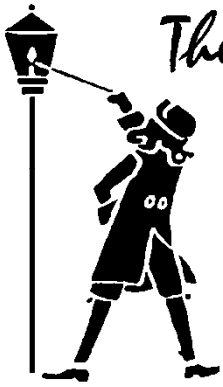


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IN CHRIST AND FOR CHRIST - TO KNOW CHRIST AND TO MAKE HIM KNOWN

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December 8, 2008

## DIGESTING GLUTTONY

I had a hunch I would need to further explain some comments I made yesterday about Lakeside's beloved Christmas Dinner. Sure enough, my family asked me some questions later that afternoon. Those comments were not scripted, so I did not fully think them out. I simply intended to use the Dinner as an example of potential abuse, not as an indictment.

The illustration related to one of the cultural misnomers, "pleasure-seeking joy." I am a strong supporter of pleasure as a gift of God. I subscribe to C.S. Lewis' theology expressed in *The Screwtape Letters*. The demon, Screwtape, writes, "Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's [*the Enemy being God*] ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better *style*." (p. 44).

In other words, the pleasures of human life were designed into the human body and soul. Pleasure is never sinful. Only the subtle corruption of the pleasure is sin – over indulging in the pleasure in frequency or amount, using pleasure as a means to achieve something that God wants to give us another way, or simply divorcing the pleasure from the Giver of the pleasure. In every case, pleasure becomes a false god, an idol of the soul, and perhaps a tyrant over the body.

I mentioned gluttony yesterday in reference to the amount of food that we can pile on our plates. Gluttony is simply consuming excessive amounts of food or drink. The natural question arises, What is "excessive?" The charge of gluttony was applied to Jesus by the Pharisees, but we know that Jesus was sinless and the charge would not stick. Gluttony is not included in any of the New Testament lists of sins. Gluttony does appear, however, on the Catholic Church's list of the seven deadly sins. Besides eating too much, Thomas Aquinas, the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic theologian, claimed gluttony could occur also by eating too soon, too expensively, too eagerly, too daintily, or wildly. Who of us can escape this list, as my daughters were quick to point the finger at me for this sin?

My wife asked, "Is there a place for feasting that would not fall into gluttony?" Feast days sprinkle the yearly calendar of Israel, instituted by God as celebrations of His gracious activity in Israel's history. Followers of Christ look forward to "the marriage supper of the Lamb," (Rev. 19:9), a time of great feasting in heaven. Lakeside's Christmas Dinner would fall into this category. We celebrate the birth of our Savior each year in this ocean of food. With a spirit of festivity, we enjoy the pleasures of the palate. This can be perfectly within the divine scope of acceptable human pleasure. It can also very subtly and deceitfully slip into gluttony.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis made one of Aquinas' fine distinctions of gluttony. Again, the demon writes to a demon in training, "The contemptuous way in which you spoke of gluttony as a means of catching souls, in your last letter, only shows your ignorance. One of the great achievements of the last hundred years has been to deaden the human conscience on that subject, so that by now you will hardly find a sermon preached or a conscience troubled about it in the whole length and breadth of Europe. This has largely been effected by concentrating all our efforts on gluttony of Delicacy, not gluttony of Excess. ... what do quantities matter provided we can use a human belly and palate to produce querulousness [complaining], impatience, uncharitableness, and self-concern?" (p. 87)

Lewis describes in that chapter a person controlled by the stomach, although she takes great care in moderation of amounts. This woman is exacting and even demanding that her food be prepared by strict guidelines and at precise times. Her innocent pleasure of food has morphed into a tyranny of gluttony, of the delicacy type rather than that of excess. Her palate must be satisfied in a precise way, and there is a price to pay when it is not.

Food is not the only place we must guard against over-indulgence. Everything we consume has the potential of excess. Americans use gasoline, natural gas, water, minerals, and a host of other natural resources, without any sense of conscience or charity. We give little thought to how our consumption might affect the poor within our own borders, much less those across the ocean. Followers of Christ are to be good stewards of what God entrusts to us, and this should call for vigilant examination of our habits and practices.

Enjoy your feasting this holiday season. Just be careful, however, that it falls within the limits that God has set for these pleasures, and that it gives glory to the One who created these pleasures.

*Pastor Stan*