

# **Wait, Weight!**

**“Eat right, and get some exercise.”**  
**I Corinthians 6:12-13**

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## **To Consume**

Have you ever been to a grocery store?

I took a cart through one the other day, and this is what I saw:

- A produce section filled with vegetables and fruits of various persuasions.
- Next, I passed by gourmet cheese; coffees and breads and a deli counter where a host of prepared foods were displayed.
- Then a dairy section appeared filled with a variety of yogurts, and milk on one side with juices and butter on the other. I had to weave my cart around more stacks in the middle of the aisle with items stacked so high they risked falling into my cart.
- On to the meats with a whole complement of cuts and varieties.
- From there, ran several aisles stacked with canned goods and boxes of processed foods made for easy eating;
- Loads and loads of candies, chips, and other high-fat, high-carb treats and drinks and freezer cases filled with ice creams.

Yada, yada, yada. You get my drift. This was a place of abundance.

Blessing.

It should have overwhelmed my senses. To think: from all of this I could pick and choose what would go from shelf and counter into my cart. It was all at my discretion.

Another month and millions of us will sit, eating and drinking away, as we watch some of our nations top athletes strain and pound their way toward an NFL championship. With the possible exception of that, we've passed from the season of overindulgence to the *season of resolutions*.

40-45% of us make them; and sometimes it works. 75% of resolution-makers keep them for at least a week. Almost half of them are still at-it after the first six months.<sup>1</sup>

Lots of resolutions: and at the top of the list is the resolve to lose weight. # 2 is exercise.<sup>2</sup>

It appears that for all the things we put in that cart and eventually into our mouths, we really *do* care about what it finally does to us.

*Resolutions* seemed like a good idea for worship themes a couple of months ago, before we passed through the season of over-indulgence. Now I wonder, *what was I thinking? What could get me in more trouble than this? And what else has the potential for inflicting guilt and shame? “Wait, weight?” Really?*

### **To Belong and to Serve**

Really. A letter in the Bible was written by Paul to the church in Corinth, Greece. This was a place where people understood that believing in Christ opened the way to making all kinds of decisions for themselves. Before, everything was regulated by strict laws. Now, they already agreed on a new maxim, or principle: *All things are lawful. All things are permissible.*

Paul didn't question that. They had the right to decide on anything that they ate or drank or did. Yet, an *anything goes* approach to consumption was already getting them into trouble. Their *free-license* was creating conflict. It surely must have been compromising their health and leading them away from God. It was like the things they let themselves eat and do were becoming obsessions: gods they were serving; rather than belonging to God.

On Christmas I stopped by my sister's house for dinner. We left the table before dessert. The television was on one of the cable channels with a program that had a guy who was going to different cities to conquer eating challenges. He'd meet some chef at a restaurant and visit the kitchen. Then they dared him to eat more than anyone could ever get down in one sitting. But he'd do it! A crowd would surround him cheering as he gorged himself with an impossible load of calories, sugars, and fats. He finished; and they would roar with high-fives and whoops. He was a hero!

'Hard for me to watch. Like pie competitions or hotdog eating contests: it's like we've made gluttony into a national sport.

Yet, in Christ: isn't *that* our freedom?

ABC's *Nightline* ran a story last week about the fattest country in the world: Nauru, a little South Pacific island republic. Up until the 1980's the hunter-gatherer people lived on grilled fish and whatever they could forage. They were among the healthiest people in the world. Then riches came for a short time; and with the riches came Western convenience foods. Now 95% of them are overweight; 85% of the men are clinically obese, and 50% of the adults have Type II diabetes – the highest on the planet. Heart failures, kidney failures, and many other weight related diseases have pulled life expectancy on that island down to less than 50 years of age. Viewers were warned that unless our habits change, that's what we can expect in just a few decades.<sup>3</sup>

All things are lawful. All things are permissible. “Yet,” says Paul, “*not all things are beneficial. I'm not going to get dominated by anything.*”

He's not going to let food or anything else become his god.

That's his bottom line.

All this is not about the shape of your body. There are lots of reasons to be heavier than you want or be less trim than you wish. More serious than how much weight you want to lose, is a spiritual issue that's more than simply physical.

Paul, along with other people of his time, had a different idea about what being human means than we do. We talk about having a body and having a soul like they are two separate things. We are prone to make a distinction between a more valuable inner spirit and an outer part that's more like the clothes we wear. They didn't. They thought more in terms of *being* bodies and *being* souls. One way can't be separate from the other.<sup>4</sup>

When Paul says that the body is not meant to be crammed with food or engaged in casual sex he's saying your *self* is not meant for this kind of stuff. It's a matter of what you are doing to your *self*.

And your *self* belongs to God. Jesus gave up everything for your belonging. Anything that gets in the way of that can be unhealthy physically and is, for sure, spiritually sick. You belong to God; and God cares about how you take care of...you.

So, here we are making resolutions, some of us; and the statistics say lots of us are resolved to reduce weight and get more exercise and stop smoking. These are good choices, but tough to keep, aren't they? Ten, eleven years ago my doctor told me my

physical condition was headed in the wrong direction, so I lost a bunch of weight; kept it off for a few years, then gained it all back. Then I took it off again. Do you wonder with me why it's hard to be consistent?

Maybe it's because we aren't well-taught to deal with it as a spiritual issue.

Don't accuse someone who has put on weight of not being right with God. It doesn't work that way.

It's about you taking care of your spiritual and physical self by considering your attitude about food. It's something for you to deal with in yourself –not to make judgments about someone else.

What is your relationship with food?

I like food – most of it. I enjoy its tastes. I need the energy it gives. I even enjoy the comfort and sense of well-being eating can bring.

Food is God's blessing.

But food is not God. If I'm too empty of God and try to fill the emptiness with food, I get in trouble. I forget that if something tastes good, it doesn't mean I should keep eating it until I feel too full or it adds points to my cholesterol. A little can go a long way: if the food is rich, and taste is the point, there's an aftertaste to savor if I stop shoving more into my mouth. If physical hunger is the point, I can fill my stomach with something that's meant to be eaten in quantity.

Keep food a blessing. Keep God – God.

There's more to it. If you want to be healthy, it's not just a matter of diet. It's also about getting the exercise you need within your physical ability. Eating is a blessing. Activity is a blessing.

But the reverse will also be true: you can diet and exercise to the point of obsession. Perhaps Paul would say *that* would be idolatry. You can wind up measuring your self-worth by numbers on the scale. You can value your six-pack abs (or wish you had them) too much. You can get to spending more time at running or yoga than prayer. Well-sculpted bodies speak neither for-or-against one's spiritual health.

Dieting and exercise can be as much a problem as overeating.

The point of it all is that whatever shape you're in, you belong to God. Shame and guilt or obsession with weight and looks can get in the way of what God apparently wants most: for you to take good care of yourself so you can thrive and live for him.

That gives you the most and the best freedom of all.

You belong to God. Christ belongs to you. What a partnership! Don't you think that gives you the best trainer of all?

### **Real Pleasure**

So, push the cart down the aisle. See the abundance God has given for health and enjoyment and even a little bit of fun.

May you put into your basket the best of the blessing.

Then may you treat it as *nothing more* than blessing, nothing less.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics gathered by Proactive Change, 119 W 57<sup>th</sup> St., New York City, New York 10019 (©) <http://www.proactivechange.com/resolutions/statistics.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "The Fattest Place on Earth," *Nightline*, ABC Television news. Monday, January 3, 2011.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 2002. p 862.