

## The Sin of Gluttony Daniel 1:11-15

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 103-111, emphasis added; English updated.

**Daniel 1:11-13** “Then Daniel said to Melzar, whom the commander of the officials had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, “Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the children that eat of the portion of the king’s delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.””

***Gluttony and luxury are vices that make a man degenerate. In contrast, the Christian virtues of frugality (abstaining from luxury) and sobriety ought to prevail.***

. . . But Daniel says, *let vegetables be put before us to eat and water to drink*. We see, then, that the four youths did not abstain from the royal food for fear of pollution; for there was no law to prevent any one drinking wine, except the Nazarites (Numbers 6:2), and they might eat of any kind of flesh, of which there was abundance at the royal table. From where then sprang this scrupulousness? because, as we said yesterday, Daniel was unwilling to accustom himself to the delicacies of the palace, which would cause him to become degenerate.

Daniel wished, therefore, to nourish his body not only frugally [sparingly, economically], but abstemiously [with moderation; restricted to bare necessities], and not to indulge in these tastes; for although he was raised to the highest honors, he was always the same as if still among the most wretched captives. There is no occasion for seeking other reasons for this abstinence of Daniel’s. For he might have fed on ordinary bread and other less delicate food; but he was content with vegetables, and was continually lamenting and nourishing in his mind the remembrance of his country, of which he would have been directly forgetful if he had been plunged into those luxuries of the palace. It follows —

***Food does not make you healthy; God does. God uses food to nourish, but without His blessing, people can eat and never be healthy or satisfied.***

**Daniel 1:14-15** “So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the children who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.”

Now this surprising event took place—Daniel contracted neither leanness nor debility from that mean [frugal, simple] food, but his face was as shining as if he had continued to feed most delicately; hence we gather as I have already said, that he was divinely impelled to persist firmly in his own design, and not to pollute himself with the royal diet. God, therefore, testified by the result that he had advised Daniel and his companions in this their prayer and proposal.

It is clear enough that there is no necessary virtue in bread to nourish us; for we are nourished by God’s secret blessing, as Moses says, “Man lives not by bread alone, (Deuteronomy 8:3), implying that the bread itself does not impart strength to men, for the bread has no life in it; how then can it afford us life? As bread possesses no virtue by

itself, **we are nourished by the word of God**; and because God has determined that our life shall be sustained by nourishment, He has breathed its virtue into the bread—but, meanwhile, **we ought to consider our life sustained neither by bread nor any other food, but by the secret blessing of God.**

For Moses does not speak here of either doctrine or spiritual life, but says our bodily life is cherished by God's favor, who has endued bread and other food with their peculiar properties. This, at least, is certain—whatever food we feed on, we are nourished and sustained by God's gratuitous power. But the example which Daniel here mentions was singular. Hence God, as I have said, shows by the event how Daniel could not remain pure and spotless with his companions otherwise than by being content with vegetables and water.

***Beware of gluttony. Do not be a slave to your taste and stomach, to the consumption of food and drink, to lavishness, to delicacy, and to luxury. Christians are called to live sparingly, frugally, and to be free from the desires of luxury. The desire for luxury distracts from our duty and from obedience and the fear of God; luxury gives way to lust of the eyes, flesh, and stomach, to greed, and materialism.***

We must observe, for our improvement, in the first place—**we should be very careful not to become slaves of the palate [the sense of taste], and thus be drawn off from our duty and from obedience and the fear of God, when we ought to live sparingly and be free from all luxuries.**

*Gluttony usually leads to obesity or drunkenness. God warns us, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Drunkenness is the opposite of sobriety. A drunk person is useless to God and society. Alcohol and all types of mind-altering drugs (even mind-numbing drugs) prevent industry, work, and productivity. Obesity inhibits our physical and mental abilities, leading to a lack of energy, decreased productivity, dementia, and memory loss. Obesity increases our likelihood of heart attack, stroke, and many other conditions that destroy our physical and mental capacities. This is why gluttony and drunkenness are deadly sins.*

*While the Bible does not command vegetarianism, it does call us to frugality instead of luxury, to save and give rather than splurge, indulge, and gorge.*

We see at this day how many feel it a very great cross if they cannot indulge at the tables of the rich, which are filled with abundance and variety of food. Others are so hardened in the enjoyment of luxuries, that they cannot be content with moderation; hence they are always wallowing in their own filth, being quite unable to renounce the delights of the palate. But Daniel sufficiently shows us, when God not only reduces us to want, but when, if necessary, all indulgences must be spontaneously rejected. Daniel indeed, as we saw yesterday, does not attach any virtue to abstinence from one kind of food or another; and all we have up until now learned has no other object than to teach him to guard against imminent danger, to avoid passing over to the morals of a strange nation, and so to conduct himself at Babylon as not to forget himself as a son of Abraham.

But still it was necessary to renounce the luxuries of the court. Although delicate foods were provided, he rejected them of his own accord; since, as we have seen, it would be deadly pollution, not in itself but in its consequences. Thus Moses, when he fled from Egypt, passed into a new life far different from his former one; for he had lived luxuriously and honorably in the king's palace, as if he had been the king's grandson.

But he lived sparingly in the Desert afterwards, and obtained his support by very toilsome labor. He preferred, says the Apostle, the cross of Christ to the riches of Egypt (Hebrews 11:26). How so? Because he could not be esteemed an Egyptian and retain the favor which had been promised to the sons of Abraham. It was a kind of self-denial always to remain in the king's palace.

**We may take this test as a true proof of our frugality and temperance, if we are able to satisfy the appetite when God compels us to endure poverty and want; nay, if we can spurn the delicacies which are at hand but tend to our destruction**

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***The Lord provides for the needs of His children.***

Lastly, this passage teaches us, although we should meet with nothing but the roots and leaves of trees, and even if the earth herself should deny us the least blade of grass, yet God by His blessing can make us healthy and active no less than those who abound in every comfort. God's liberality, however, is never to be despised when He nourishes us with bread and wine and other diet; for Paul enumerates, among things worthy of praise, his knowing how to bear both abundance and penury [extreme want] (Philippians 4:12). When, therefore, God bountifully offers us both meat and drink, we may soberly and frugally drink wine and eat savory food; but when He takes away from us bread and water, so that we suffer from famine, we shall find His blessing sufficient for us instead of all nutriment. For we see that Daniel and his companions were ruddy and plump, and even remarkably robust by feeding on nothing but vegetables. How could this occur, unless the Lord, who nourished His people in the Desert on manna alone, when other diet was deficient, even at this day turns our food into manna, which would otherwise be injurious to us (Exodus 16:4). . . .

***Gluttony is not entirely about the cost of food but the lack of moderation in eating. We should eat so that we can live healthy lives, not live to eat.***

Temperance does not exist in the food itself, but in the palate—since we are equally intemperate if pleasure entices us to gratify the appetite on inferior food—so, again, we may remain perfectly temperate though feeding on the best diet. . . .

### **Prayer**

Grant, Almighty God, since we are now encompassed by so many enemies, and the devil does not cease to harass us with fresh snares, so that the whole world is hostile to us, that we may perceive even the devil himself to be restrained by Your bridle. Grant, also, that all the impious may be subjected to You, that You may lead them wherever You wish. Direct their hearts, and may we be experimentally taught how safe and secure we are under the protection of Your hand. And may we proceed, according to Your promise, in the course of our calling, until at length we arrive at that blessed rest which is laid up for us in heaven by Christ our Lord. — Amen.