

"Even if it's technically okay, I will not be a slave to anything, and that's -- that's where we -- we really got to think about that. You know, he's talking about sexual immorality here, and people are a slave to their impulses and desires, and Paul says, I will not be a slave to my impulses and desires."

Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast. I'm Travis Pauley, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. Each week I visit with Wes McAdams, minister and author, and together we explore biblical passages and topics. I hope you enjoy this study.

TRAVIS: All right, Wes. We're back.

WES: We are back, and today's question is making me a little nervous, so...

TRAVIS: This is a good question. I don't know that I've ever really heard it brought up, which is sort of the premise of the question.

WES: Yeah.

TRAVIS: "I can honestly say that I have rarely, if ever, heard a lesson about obesity. If the scriptures are true, and I believe that they are, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is self-control, so why is it permissible in America for God's people to stiff-arm the Holy Spirit in this matter? I'm not pointing a finger, as I am among the same group and am just now realizing what a terrible witness it is. Would you speak to this, please?"

WES: And that was sent in by an anonymous --

TRAVIS: Anonymous.

WES: Yes, by an anonymous listener or reader. I'm not really sure if he reads or listens. He or she -- I shouldn't really even give away gender, but -- if they read or listen to the podcast or the blog. But, yeah, I thought it was a great question and I thought it was one that we should include on the podcast. I want to reframe it, though. As you were reading it, it occurred to me that maybe we should reframe it. The person who sent the e-mail worded it in terms of obesity, and I think it might be more helpful if we -- if we frame the question and the response in terms of overeating.

TRAVIS: Gluttony.

WES: Yeah. Well, and I wouldn't even say gluttony, and I'm glad that you brought that word up. Most of the time -- and, I mean, gluttony is overeating, to a degree. Most of the time -- it's interesting. If you do a word search on gluttony, or gluttonous, or glutton in your Bible, you're going to find that it's mentioned very seldom. So like some people that are like, yeah, well, you never talk about gluttony but you're always talking about this sin, or whatever, like what they really mean is you should stop talking about my sin and start talking about a different sin, you know, whatever.

Gluttony is mentioned very, very seldom, and it's almost always -- in fact, it may always be, but I'll stick with "almost always" because I'm not sure. That little peek behind the curtain is when I say "almost always," it's to cover myself just in case somebody says, oh, yeah --

TRAVIS: Just in case.

WES: Yeah, because if I said "always," then there would probably be an exception. But it's almost always paired with drunkenness, and it's really about -- gluttony is really about a lifestyle of being a drunkard and a glutton. Like that's almost always how it's phrased, like a drunkard and a glutton, and it's just somebody who has made a lifestyle out of overindulgence, just somebody who just is lazy and --

TRAVIS: Sort of hedonistic.

WES: Yeah, hedonistic. That's a great word. A hedonistic person that is just wallowing in wealth and food and drink and just disgusting, and I mean that in a way that we probably don't even grasp. I mean, there have been times -- there were times in the ancient world where it was very disgusting.

TRAVIS: The Romans really had a system.

WES: They really did. And, I mean, they had vomitoriums where they would, you know, just -- and I apologize to listeners and to Travis who's grimacing as I said that.

TRAVIS: Wincing.

WES: Yeah. But, yeah, I mean, they would overeat to the point that it would make them sick, and they would make themselves sick on purpose just to continue to feast and overindulge, and would do the same with drink, and just horrible, hedonistic, disgusting types of lifestyles. So I mean, that's not really what we're talking about.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: We're not talking about that. But I think that, especially in the west, and especially in the United States, we do need to talk about this.

We need to talk about -- yes, you could put it in terms of obesity, but that's really about body mass index, and I have no -- I'm not a doctor, nor do I play one on TV.

TRAVIS: Right.

WES: And I don't really care to even talk about somebody's body mass index and what makes a person obese, and -- you know, who knows? I don't know. I mean, I --

TRAVIS: Because there could be a lot of factors in place beyond just --

WES: Absolutely. There's health factors and, yeah, thyroid issues and whatever. There's all kinds of issues in that regard.

But I think that there is a place for us to talk about overeating, and I really appreciate the person who sent the e-mail for saying that the self-control -- bringing up the issue of self-control, and especially tying that to Galatians 5 in what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit. So one of the characteristics or aspects of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control, and we really struggle with that in America. We really struggle, not just with food --

TRAVIS: No.

WES: -- with all kinds of things, and we allow ourselves to be mastered by food and drink and entertainment, and it's really problematic. And I'll say -- and, you know, so I'll talk from a personal perspective. I, at one time, weighed about 60 pounds more than I do now. I said I wasn't going to talk about weight, but I'm just talking about me personally, and my weight issues have been related to a lack of self-control. And I'm not saying everyone's is, and we have to be very careful. I'm not talking

about judging anyone else. I'm not talking about anybody judging anybody else for how much they weigh or whether they look like they're overweight, or whatever. That's not our place. But I am talking about me, and I am saying that there have been many times in my life -- in fact, my life has sort of been a roller coaster of how much I've weighed, and mine has been tied almost entirely to being -- to exercising a lack of self-control.

And it's funny, I did that -- Hollee got me the 23andMe, the little chromosome testing, and they not only tell you your ancestry, but they also tell you some health factors related to your DNA. One of the interesting tidbits on my report was that I have a higher than average likelihood of being overweight based on my DNA. So I mean, I could look at that and be like, oh, see, it's not my fault. That's not my problem. It's because I inherited bad genes, or whatever. But in all honesty, I mean, my weight fluctuation has been almost entirely related to lack of self-control. I really like sweets. Like I love to eat sweets, and I don't like to eat just a little bit. I like to eat until I can't eat any more of it. And there have been lots of times in my life where that's been the case. But what I have found, that self-control in our own life is contagious. What I mean is that it very rarely only relates to one area of our life. That when we exercise self-control in one area, it helps us to exercise self-control in other areas. When we fail to exercise self-control in one area, it leads to us failing to exercise self-control in other areas.

And so I think that there really is a discussion around this that we have to have, and we have to acknowledge the fact that part of what it

looks like -- again, according to Galatians 5, Paul says, "You know" -- "You know what is the work of the flesh. It's evident what is the work of the flesh and what is the fruit of the Spirit. This is what the Spirit produces in people who walk by the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." And he says, "This is what a -- you might even say this is what a spiritual person looks like. A spiritual person is self-controlled."

And so if I am not a self-controlled person -- and there have been so many times in my life where when I'm exercising self-control, other people will say to me, well, you just got so much willpower. And I've thought that about other people, and I think, man, they just seem to have so much willpower. What we're really saying is, "You can say no to yourself. You see something that you want to do and you don't do it because you know it's not good," or, "You see something that you don't want to do but you do it anyway because you know it's good. You have the ability to overcome your impulses and desires." And Paul says that's a characteristic, not of somebody with strong willpower, as if that's part of your DNA, like I was just born with a strong willpower; I'm just a strong-willpower person. You know, it's like that's not how it works. Paul says this is a product of being a spiritual person, of walking by the Spirit, and when you walk by the Spirit, the Spirit produces in you fruit, and one of the characteristics of that fruit is the ability to say no to your desires and impulses.

So it should be a red flag to us when we look at other people and say, man, I wish I had their willpower. I wish I could push away from the

table as much as they do. I wish I could say no to the second helping of pecan pie. I'm picking on myself because that's what -- you know, I wish I could say no to those things, and I wish I could get up early in the morning or read my Bible, or whatever it is. I wish I had that kind of willpower. If we even think those things, it should be a red flag in our mind that says, wait a second. My lack of self-control, my lack of ability to do the good that I know I ought to do, or to push away from the bad that I know that I ought to push away from, it's a symptom of not walking by the Spirit.

And, again, I'm not talking about -- I'm not giving you ammunition, listener, or anybody -- I'm not giving somebody ammunition to go judge somebody else for not being spiritual, but what I am saying is those times in my life where I was 60 pounds overweight because of my overindulgence, it was a symptom of a spiritual problem. My spiritual problem was I wasn't walking by the Spirit, and because I wasn't walking by the Spirit, I -- the Spirit wasn't producing in me self-control. And so we have to, like, recognize that in ourselves and say, okay, well, how do I -- how do I walk by the -- that's the question, is how do I walk by the Spirit? And that -- and it should be -- I mean, it should be so, so obvious that our life is going to be filled with whatever we fill ourselves up with, right? I mean, so it's like if -- and this is -- and, again, part of what I'm talking about is what I find in scripture, but part of it, too, is just experiential, like what I've experienced in my life, is that when I fill my life up with entertainment, you know, when I fill myself up with worldly things -- and I'm not saying "worldly" as in like sinful, but just

worldly -- even just advertisements.

TRAVIS: Totally.

WES: They are breaking down our willpower by encouraging us to walk by the flesh. "You have a problem with this? Well, here's the solution." "You want this? You want more of this and more of this and more of this? Then we can give it to you." And they can -- you know, they are encouraging us to walk by the flesh, and the results of that are the things that we are experiencing. Part of that is a lack of self-control.

And so if we want to walk by the Spirit, then we have to -- what Paul talks about in Ephesians, in Chapter 5, when he talks -- and we've talked about this passage at length. He commands them, "Don't be filled with wine. Don't get drunk with wine." Again, "Don't be overindulgent; be self-controlled. Be wise. Look at how you're walking. Don't be foolish; be filled with the Spirit." And then he says, "How?" "By teaching and admonishing one another, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord." I mean, it's that. It's making -- being intentional about making time in our life for being filled with the Spirit.

You know, and I -- and this is kind of maybe getting off track, I don't know, but I read -- I started a book the other day. I'll probably write a book recommendation on it pretty soon, but it's about the work of the Spirit in our life, and the way he puts it is it's almost like if you say, you know, have your backyard filled with birds, but you can't, like, force birds to come to your backyard, but what you can do is you can create an environment that's inviting to the birds. You can create an environment that is welcoming to the birds. And the Spirit of God is a person. I mean,

he's a personality; he's not a thing. He's not The Force. You know, there's no way to, you know, manipulate the Holy Spirit to come into your life. You have to practice spiritual things, open your life up to being filled by the Spirit. Part of that is singing to one another in the -- in the assembly, in gathering together with God's people and setting your minds on things above, not on the things of the earth.

And so -- and part of that discipline is things like fasting. And I don't mean fasting like go on a diet. I don't mean fasting to lose weight. I mean fasting to open yourself up to the Spirit, who produces in you self-control. And part of what fasting teaches us is food is not as important to me as God. My hunger for God is greater and deeper than my hunger for food, and I would rather go without food than go without God. But we don't practice that; we don't practice fasting. We don't practice fasting in good times, or habitually, or in bad times. When things are bad, we don't fast as they did in scripture, as the biblical authors assumed that we would. We just -- we don't practice it and we just overindulge, overindulge, overindulge, and we are training our heart and our mind that nothing is as important to me as food. Nothing is as important to me as my appetites being satisfied. If I have an appetite, it must be satisfied. If I have a desire, I must satisfy it.

And look at the world we live in. We live in a world that is completely at the mercy of their own appetites, whether that's sexually or when it comes to our appetites for food or other things, we live in a world that says if you have a feeling and you have a want and you have a desire, then go out and satisfy that. What things like fasting teach us is,

no, I am not a slave to my appetites. I am not a slave to my desires. I can say no. By the power of the Spirit who lives within me, my desire is for God; my desire is for his Spirit. My desire is not for these things. And when my desire is for these things, I have the ability to say no to those things. And we have -- we just have to recognize the need for that kind of an attitude and the lack of it when it's not there.

TRAVIS: Yeah.

I apologize for the interruption, but if you're enjoying this Bible study, you might also enjoy the audio version of my book *Beyond the Verse*. If you're not already an Audible subscriber, you can get the book for free with a 30-day free trial with Audible. Just visit RadicallyChristian.com/Audible. Now back to the Bible study.

TRAVIS: You know, I'm sure a lot of -- most of us feel this way, but self-control has always had a negative connotation in my mind, that it's painful, that it's -- and it surely can be, but in the last couple years I kind of had an opportunity to kind of reexamine my life and how I -- what I valued and what I -- how I organize myself. And somebody encouraged me to examine my principles, to decide kind of now, at an early stage, what are my principles going to be to govern my life? And one of the ones that I picked out was self-control. But to kind of go easy on myself, I gave a little tag to it to sort of re-explain it, and so my tag was to know what I need when I need it. And so that kind of flips it for me, that it's like -- it's not just about saying no. It's also about knowing what I need

and less about what do I want, what's my appetite, but what do I need?

And to kind of build on to that, I've noticed, trying to do that and failing many times but then kind of getting back up on the horse and going again, is, man, I don't want to let -- whether it's with food -- and I'll use food just as an analogy, but, you know when you eat too much and you get tired?

WES: Yeah.

TRAVIS: It's like you go into a food coma, right? It happens a lot around the holidays. And my -- the way I think about it now is like, okay, so when I have self-control, when I know when to stop, when I know when to take care of myself -- you know, to relate it back to Jesus, it's like Jesus -- you know, the best of us -- he knew when to take time for himself; he knew when he needed to retreat from the crowds and from everybody and go have time alone. It's not just about saying no to things; it's also about knowing what you need and taking that opportunity, and to be clearer and to not fall asleep. See, I don't want to have so much of something that I fall asleep, whether it's food -- or then, you know, sometimes if you overindulge on anything, then it doesn't mean anything to you, but you do it because that's just what you do. And you think, well, it's still probably better than if I didn't have a second helping or, you know -- but your enjoyment is gone.

And it's like that's where -- you know, I always like to make connections and draw patterns in scripture, and walking in the light, not in the dark; being awake, not asleep. That's my goal, is to not put myself in situations where I'm falling asleep because I just -- I'm just dead to my

surroundings. And, man, I want to have a zest for life. I want to enjoy it, and I can't do that if I overindulge.

WES: Yeah, I think that -- great points. I wanted to bring back to one other passage, I Corinthians 6. In I Corinthians, he's talking about -- and if you're listening with your kids, just warning, I'm going to talk about sexual immorality, but... So I mean, he's talking about sexual immorality and he's telling them you can't be a follower of Jesus and be living this way. And then he sort of quotes some of the things that they are saying, apparently as justification for their behavior, and he quotes this in verse 12 of chapter 6. He says, "All things are lawful for me" -- as if like that's what they're saying. "All things are lawful for me," and then he says, "but not all things are helpful. Just because you're not under the law of Moses, it doesn't mean everything that you do is okay, because some things are not wise and not helpful." And sometimes, you know, we could use a lack of -- a lack of condemnation to something -- "Well, there's nothing in the Bible that says I can't eat whatever I want to. There's nothing in the Bible that says I can't eat myself silly with pecan pie or" -- you know, it's like, well, no, but it's not helpful.

How is this bringing glory to God? How is this exercising self-control? How is this -- you know, to our listener's question, you know, how is this being a good example to the people that are watching and being influenced by you? Is this helpful? Is this edifying? And then he says, "All things are lawful for me, that may be true, but I will not be dominated by anything. Even if it's technically okay, I will not be a slave to anything," and that's where we really got to think about that. And,

you know, he's talking about sexual immorality here, and people are a slave to their impulses and desires, and Paul says, "I will not be a slave to my impulses and desires."

And, man, there's not a more relevant word for our culture today than that one because we have -- even in the church, have fallen victim to the lie that if you have a feeling or a desire, that must be the way God created you; you might as well indulge it. Wait, that's not the gospel message at all. God is working to transform us so that we can do what is good and what is right and to say no to those desires. Just because you have a desire -- I mean, there's times where I have a violent desire, like somebody makes me so mad I want to slam my fist down or I want to throw something against a wall, or -- I mean, we're human beings and we're a mixed bag of desires and impulses, and we cannot be dominated by those impulses and desires.

He says -- and here's another thing that they quote, and, apparently, an argument that they're making for living their sexually immoral life. He says, "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." Like that's what food's for, is to eat and enjoy, so I'm going to eat it and enjoy it. And he's really there making an analogy to sex and saying, hey, that's what sex is for. If I have this desire, I'm going to do it. Just like if there's food there, I'm going to eat it, you know? I'm going to go do whatever I want to do. And he says -- Paul says, "God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will raise us up by his power." He says, "Don't you know that our bodies

are members of Christ?" And, of course, he's talking about sexual immorality, and so am I. I'm talking about every desire and impulse that we have. And Paul is saying just because you have a desire and an impulse to eat something or to sleep with someone doesn't make it good. Your body belongs to Jesus and you've been united with Jesus and so you need to do things in your body and with your body that bring glory to God.

Yeah, there's not a whole lot in the Bible about what to eat or what not to eat or going on a diet or not going on a diet, or -- I mean, anybody that says otherwise -- you know, like the Bible diet or, you know, the secret code to what you should eat in the Bible -- I mean, it's just not the context. It's just not what it's talking about. But the Bible has a whole lot to say about being wise and being self-controlled and not being victim or slave to our impulses and desires. And, man, in the United States of America in the 21st century, we need to hear that message. And there's too much amongst Christians -- amongst preachers, to be honest -- too much joking about "I just eat whatever I want to and I can outeat anybody," and it's like that's really nothing to be proud of. And it's not about how much you weigh; it's about whether or not you're allowing the Spirit of God to work in your life so that you can say yes to the things that are wise and good and no to the things that are foolish and harmful.

And we really -- we have a good-news message to share with the world and we need to make sure that our influence isn't harmed by our own lack of self-control when it comes to, you know, what we're doing

sexually or what we're doing with our mouth, what we're doing when we drive our car, and what we're doing at the dinner table. We've got to make sure that our behavior speaks well of the message that we're preaching and that it doesn't undermine it.

I really hope you enjoyed this Bible study and I hope you'll subscribe to hear future episodes of the podcast. A big thank you to Travis Pauley, as well as our McDermott Road church family, for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.

- Wes