

"Whose God Is Their Belly"

by Wayne Goff

"(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)" -- Philippians 3:18-19.

The Belly, Stomach

Sometimes I *stumble* across things in the Bible which I first find *interesting*, and then compelling. So it is with our subject in this article: **stomach, belly**.

Most of us probably think of this word in relation to its size: large or small; fat or flat; too big or too little. Especially is this the case at the first of a new year. People resolve to get off some of last year's fat. But there's more to it than that, surely.

"Belly" or "stomach" comes from a Greek word (koilia) which *literally* means "hollow, cavity" and refers *primarily* to the abdomen. It can refer to the womb, but most often indicates the stomach. When it is used *figuratively*, it is the heart.

The word appears twenty-two times in the New Testament, **NKJV**: "belly" (Matt. 12:40 + 2 other verses), "stomach" (Matt. 15:17 + 5 other verses), "womb" (Matt. 19:12 + 14 other verses), "heart" (Jn. 7:38). Obviously, we are centering on a couple of passages which mention the stomach or belly as man's "God"!

The God "belly"

Our Pauline text tells us that some brethren in Paul's day served "their belly" rather than the Lord. The end result of such a life is "destruction," and they could be known because they "glory ... in their shame" as they mind "earthly things." Of whom is Paul *specifically* speaking? I think a similar passage helps us see one application: **false teachers**. We know this is correct for in Romans 16 Paul warns the brethren to "mark" those who cause divisions and offenses and avoid them, because they "do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own **belly**" (Rom. 16:18). Some may think Paul is being a bit **severe** on his own brethren, but he is telling the truth. As harsh as that may sound, in Philippians Paul says that he relates this truth "even weeping." He took no pleasure in pointing out false teachers.

But why use this terminology? Because when men serve themselves, they are simply doing that which appeases their own hearts, their own desires, their own appetites -- hence, **their own bellies**. The whole system of idolatry is based upon this concept. Man rejects God and sets up one to suit himself. His God becomes his belly!

Euripides

Euripides, an ancient Greek playwright, once wrote the play "Cyclops." (If you're familiar with mythology, then you remember this creature. They were a race of one-eyed giants.) In his play, Cyclops states the obvious:

"My flocks which I sacrifice to no one but myself, and not to the gods, and to this my belly the greatest of the gods: for to eat and drink each day, and to give one's self no trouble, this is the God for wise men" ("Cyclops," 334-338).

When you reflect upon that quote, it helps you appreciate mankind when they act the same way. We call them "animals" today. It is even more tragic when some of these are numbered among God's people in Paul's day.

The God "appetite"

Paul referred to a common *euphemistic* expression in his day which some used to defend their fornication: "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats" (1 Cor. 6:13, **KJV**). His response was that God would destroy both "meats" and the "belly" in judgment! Instead, Paul replaces the argument with a higher one: "the body is for the Lord; and the Lord for the body." In other words, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and are to be used to God's glory even as we use them for their God-intended purposes (vv. 19-20).

The lesson for us: Be sure we serve the true God!

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