What should all consumers get? (21:17)

He who loves pleasure *will become* a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich.

THE TEXT (NASB)

He who loves pleasure *will become* a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not become rich.

He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. KJV - Proverbs 21:17

INTRODUCTION



Get moderation.

Consumers need to learn self-control. Blissfully ignorant of the true costs of our lifestyles, so many of us cash-out short-term pleasures and lock-in long-term pains.

Simple pleasures like luxurious foods are not evil in themselves, but when we start to treat them like necessities, then, whatever our wealth, we impoverish ourselves.

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COMMENTARY

A Double-Barrel Blast

Look at the text carefully. The same powerful truth blasts out from both sides of the proverb. It starts with the same words and repeats the same message, moving us from present wealth to future poverty. The abuse of wealth brings poverty. Guaranteed!

Note also that the words “will become,” are in italics. The italics means that the words are absent in the original Hebrew. So the text literally reads, “He who loves pleasure—a poor man.” Brevity strengthens the point. But then is it wrong to enjoy exceptional pleasures?

Why bother to be rich, if you can’t enjoy the benefits of wealth? The answer is found in the details of the translation.

Translation: *loves, poor, pleasure*



The Hebrew word for “loves,” אהב (ʾā•hăḇ, pronounced “ahab”), is repeated in this text. The Bible’s first use is at Genesis 22:2, describing the love of Abraham for his only son, Isaac. It later describes the love that Isaac has for Rebecca, while later yet, it shows Isaac’s consuming love for savory meat. In total, the Bible uses it 195 times, focussed on many different objects—including God’s love for man and man’s love for God. It always means a constant devotion, rather than some sporadic desire, an intense dedication rather than a simple inclination. It’s the word in the commandment, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” Leviticus 19:18. So in this proverb, the love of pleasure, wine, and oil are not merely an occasional enjoyment, but a deliberate devotion. The Message edition paraphrases this text, “You're addicted to thrills? What an empty life. The pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied.”

The Hebrew word for “poor,” רׇאוּחַ־מ (măḥ•sôr, pronounced “makh-sōr”), is derived from a root for lacking or decreasing. It implies the loss of something that we once had. So in this text, we had more wealth than we needed, and we used it to cultivate the devotion to luxuries. We developed a discontent with simple, inexpensive pleasures, and we made splurging a habit.

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The Hebrew word for “pleasure,” שִׂמְחָה (śim•ḥāh, pronounced “sim-khah”), refers to a state of contentment, arising from things pleasing to the senses. So turning our occasional little luxuries into permanent habits really dulls our senses, so we no longer enjoy them as special.

Classic Comments

The JFB Commentary puts it succinctly: “Costly luxuries impoverish.”

Matthew Henry describes the text as “an argument against a voluptuous, luxurious life, taken from the ruin it brings upon men’s temporal interests.” So he defines the epicure: “He loves pleasure. God allows us to use the delights of sense soberly and temperately ... but he that loves these ... as the best pleasures, and has his mouth by them put out of taste for spiritual delights, he is an epicure.” And the fate of the epicure in this world? “He shall be a poor man; for the lusts of sensuality are not maintained but at great expense. [They] live upon alms, who once could not live without dainties and varieties. Many a beau becomes a beggar.”

A Sophisticated Loser

An epicure is a person who obsessively cultivates a refined taste, especially in food and wine: A connoisseur. The word derives from the Greek philosopher, Epicurus, who taught that pleasure is the highest good. Yet he also identified virtue as the greatest pleasure. Over time, the term became identified pejoratively with “he who gives himself over to sensual pleasures.” Apostle Paul warns of those in the last days who are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” 2 Timothy 3:2-4. Elsewhere, he warns of those who live to eat, rather than eat to live, whose “God is their belly,” Philippians 3:19.

Gourmet Foods and Consumables



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We know wine is intended for consumption, but what of the oil? This is not lamp oil or petroleum. That leaves either oil for perfume and anointing, or oil for eating. So the text can be read to discourage excessive use of expensive perfumes, but most commentators believe it's cooking oil, as suggested by Proverbs 21:20 where "precious treasure and oil is swallowed-up."

Cooking oil is certainly not a luxury in first world countries, but it is world-wide. It's an ingredient in the delicious pastries described in Ezekiel 16:13. So this proverb warns of danger for us who demand a diet of delicacies. We mimic the aristocratic Marie Antoinette, who, when hearing about the starving poor of Paris, said, "They have no bread? Let them eat cake"—the guillotine curbed her fine tastes.

Whoever constantly eat greasy foods, turns lethargic. Yet even if we don't become lazy with gluttony, or alcoholic with wine, we enslave ourselves to costly consumables. We spend more than sensible on vanishing commodities. Occasional feasts can nurture valuable, permanent fellowship, but the consumption itself leaves nothing behind.

Limiting Luxuries

This proverb warns against expensive foods, but any frills can turn into high-cost habits:

- designer clothing;
- celebrity cosmetics;
- luxury-branded cars;
- rarely-used cottages and toys; and
- luxurious (alcohol-forgotten) vacations.

None of these are necessities, but when we turn them into habits, we've simply created another nagging need for ourselves. So this proverb warns us to limit short-lived pleasures, even if we can afford them. They're the path to monetary and spiritual poverty.

Note, however, that the proverb warns against expensive toys, not expensive tools. Our investment in high-quality, durable goods contributes permanent substance to our work, our family and community. So it's important for a farmer to invest in a high-quality tractor, rather than a high-priced sports car.

Prestige is Pricey



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The tempting reality, however, is that public luxury can boost our ego. There is prestige in the life of a gourmand and connoisseur of fine wines. Yet Dick Snyder, editor of Toronto's high-end food-and-drink magazine, City Bites, was quoted, saying, "I'm not a glutton; I know when to stop. Just because I have eight different types of salt in my pantry, does it make me a sinner? No. I've got a good job and I can afford it. I don't drive a Porsche, I don't wear ostentatious clothing. You make your choices," (Financial Post, 6 May 2008).

He's right. We all make our choices. But this proverb teaches, it's not our salary, but our spending habits that make us rich. Snyder says he "knows when to stop," which shows a degree of conscious restraint. Yet he must be careful that his love of gourmet food does not limit his freedom. Poverty comes fast to those with champagne taste, but a beer budget—or no budget.

Thanks Mom

I thank my mother for her example of thrift in preparing bag lunches, rather than eating out. Years ago, she worked in downtown Toronto. She started out in the Sears steno pool, then over two decades, as she and my dad raised their four kids, she climbed the ladder to the position of a bilingual executive legal secretary. Finally, she gave herself a winter vacation to Florida, shocking the other secretaries. "How can you afford a winter vacation in this economy, on a secretary's wages?" they wondered. My mom asked how much they spent on lunch that day. The average was three dollars. Mom replied, "I brought my lunch from home and saved three dollars today, sixty dollars this month, and almost seven hundred dollars this year. My vacation money came from my lunch money."

This story makes my point. Thrift is a learned skill. It starts small, almost insignificantly. And it survives in times of abundance, only if we hold strongly to our financial objectives. If we stay focused on specific targets, we're more likely to sacrifice comfort and personal preference for the greater good. I know a family who saved aggressively for a new piano, by taping a photo of the piano on their refrigerator. And when they achieved that luxury, they really enjoyed it.

ENJOY but Limit Luxuries

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This proverb does not condemn pleasures. No! Enjoy life's pleasures, but don't make them your life pursuit. Pick something nobler than food, even fancy food. Apostle Paul derides those "whose god is their belly." Here's the lesson: to increase our wealth, we must be satisfied with simple food. Buy food with good nutrition, and prepare it with good taste. Fast foods are more expensive and moderately nutritious. Limit your devotion to luxury. Wealth in itself has limited benefit (Proverbs 23:4). Poor is the man whose only wealth is money.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus loved a good party. He enjoyed festivities. At a wedding, Jesus made much more wine than they needed (700 gallons!), rather than scold, "They've had enough to drink," John 2:3-10. His enemies called him a glutton and a drunkard. This implies they saw him eat and drink with gusto (Matthew 11:18-19).

On the other hand, Jesus also spent many times fasting and going without pleasurable food (Matthew 4:1-2, John 4:31-32). He showed more self-control than anyone who ever lived. Further, and good for the rest of us, Jesus is a "life-giving spirit," 1 Corinthians 15:45. He Himself states, "I came to give life, and to give it abundantly," John 10:10.

So, the only place to get real self-control is from Jesus, at a divine banquet of supernatural life. Self-control and its joy come from the Spirit of God.

APPLICATION

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- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Learn to live comfortably, but *below* your means. This will mean giving up short-term luxuries in exchange for long term freedom.
- Stop consuming expensive foods and drinks. Learn (it takes time) to enjoy cheaper, simpler foods but don't decrease the nutritional value of your consumption. For example, give up sugar laden breakfast cereals for oatmeal to which you can add your own toppings.
- Learn the practice of physical fasting—but also be sure you know how to celebrate at a feast. True self control is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It comes from the last Adam (Christ) not from human effort or will-power inherited from our parents or grandparents, stemming from the first Adam.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.

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KEY WORDS

alcohol, consumption, gluttony, less assets (quantity), love, poverty, rich, self-control, self-indulgence, contentment, saving money, budget, bf spending

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Tax-Driven Ted?



Death and taxes: The only things we can be sure of! Certainly that's the way Tax-Driven Ted sees it. Whereas others pay some or little attention to taxes, he is consumed by tax minimization. Ted is tax obsessed. Why? For many Canadians, if left unmanaged, taxes eliminate over 50% of income. In Canada tax freedom day falls in July.

Tax freedom day is the day of the year when you have paid all your taxes and can now keep the rest of the money you earn. Tax-Driven Ted will spend money just to get a write-off. He fails to seriously evaluate the underlying economics behind the decision and chooses to focus on the tax consequences. He loves to borrow money to invest simply because he can write off the interest costs of amount borrowed. This investment technique is called leveraging and is commonplace.

Ted doesn't believe he should pay any taxes. After all, the government wastes money. It's extremely inefficient. He uses every angle to reduce taxes. He's always looking for loopholes, credits, or write-offs. *His focus is not on customer satisfaction but on tax reduction.*

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He goes on trips and conferences so that he can take the tax write-offs. He loves limited partnerships investments and other tax shelters. For some investors tax considerations are secondary, but for Tax-Driven Ted, they come first.

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