

## Self-Restraint In The Age Of Too Much

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This country is blessed with great wealth. It is undeniable that we have much more in even the most destitute parts of our land than most country's do in their finest. Our standard of living is one of the highest in the world, and aside from what it may feel like at times, our unemployment and inflation rates are ahead of only a few countries. We have excellent hospitals, high life expectancy, food in such abundance that we throw it out by the ton, and so much space in our homes that we spend entire lifetimes filling them with possessions that we hardly use. In almost every sense of the phrase, we live in a land of plenty.

There is nothing necessarily wrong with having an abundance. God did not create us for the purpose of being miserable, and even affirms happily through the Preacher in Ecclesiastes 2:24-25, *"There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?"* There is no sin in looking upon one's accomplishments and the fruit of his labor and feeling content (Ecclesiastes 5:19). Even Paul, who some assert was a man who relished in his poverty, admits that he had the ability to live quite happily in times of plenty. *"I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need"* (Philippians 4:12).

### Overindulgence

We see as a theme throughout human history that societies with a great abundance of wealth and food tend to fall into the trap of great indulgence in those things. The pattern is not left out of the Bible, which describes the history of the Israelites in clear detail. Consider Numbers 11:31-33. Having recently escaped the Egyptians, the former slaves are blessed by God with a great amount of quail. The birds so thickly dot the landscape that they are, in many places, waste deep. *"And the people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague."* In the surplus of food, there was no moderation, but only extreme gluttony. Each person took far more than was needed and was punished for it. Is this not similar to phenomena throughout our own land? People buy food at the grocery store and throw much of it away when it spoils in the refrigerator. Heartless businessmen continually drive people to poverty by ruthlessness. Patrons fill their plates and stomachs at buffets far beyond what the human body calls for in its desire for sustenance. We spend, splurge, pour out, drink up, top off, and max out everything when excess is totally uncalled for by the situation.

But is there any joy in this? How many of us have heard the phrase, "If I only had a little more, then I'd be happy?" This was Solomon's philosophy, and he describes his experiences in Ecclesiastes 2. There is no other man in the world more qualified than Solomon to tell us about absolute indulgence, for nobody else had as much wealth as

him. If we are to take anybody's word for it, then Solomon is the one. *"I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.' And behold, it too was futility"* (Ecclesiastes 2:1). Pleasure is often the first place to which people turn for fulfillment in life. We often think that a boat, a fast car, a life of fun and games, or gross misuse of our sexuality will bring happiness and contentment to our souls. This philosophy is called hedonism, a term which means "pleasure-seeking or self-indulgence." With all of the resources available to him, the writer must have had quite a time trying every pleasurable activity this world has to offer. *"This experiment. . . proves itself a failure: he found a life of pleasure to be a hollow life; that also, viz. devotedness to mirth, was to him manifestly vanity"* (**Commentary On The Old Testament**, Vol. 6, Keil-Delitzsch, 233).