

Self-Restraint In The Age Of Too Much (part 2)

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“All that I desired...”

Ecclesiastes 2:9-11 includes the phrase *“and all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them.”* Truly, this is at the core of hedonism. Solomon saw something good, wanted it, and got it without a problem. There are few evils that plague mankind like the desire for instant gratification and uncontrolled consumption. Left unchecked, a man’s desires will lead him into complete ruin – when he gets what he wants *all* the time, there is no room left for dreaming, striving, goal-setting, or hard-work in earning one’s possessions. *“And this was my reward for all my labor”* (2:10). Essentially, his possessions were the reward for his lifetime of seeking. But if physical treasures are the sum total, how miserable of a life is that? Solomon is absolutely right when he says that all of life is vanity *if* life only consists of one’s possessions. Our Lord Jesus refutes this idea by stating, *“Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions”* (Luke 12:15). None of our property will help us stand justified before God on the last day. The Righteous Judge does not care about how wealthy any of us are! Solomon proved this, and he stands today as the most complete example of what overindulgence does for the soul.

A Response to Excess

But gluttony can also hurt us in more practical ways. A glutton is not only one who eats too much, but can also be one who wastes in any aspect of life. People who drink too much soda, spend vast amounts of money on clothes, buy “toys” like jet skis, boats, or ATVs haphazardly. But the problem is that their abundance leads to their ruin. *“Listen, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. Do not be with heavy drinkers of wine, or with gluttonous eaters of meat; for the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags”* (Proverbs 23:19-21). It is not that any of these are inherently sinful, but that those who seek them obsessively or excessively will find themselves ruined and absolutely unfulfilled in their pursuits.

Is it true what parents say about too much of a good thing? Indeed, abundance has the negative effect of harming us when we take something good and wholesome to an extreme, just as Proverbs 25:16 tells us, *“Have you found honey? Eat only what you need, lest you have it in excess and vomit it.”* Do not look to excess for fulfillment, because it only leaves us sick. How many very wealthy families lose everything they have of true value because of the pursuit of abundance? And how many broken families think that more possessions will plug the hole? Even more, how does excess leave us feeling? Sick to our stomachs.

Self-Restraint

I like the way one verse describes the state of the world, *“For the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had brought about a lack of restraint in Judah and was very unfaithful to the Lord”* (2 Chronicles 28:19). The result of this lack of self-

restraint was misery for the people in the form of Edomite and Philistine invasions. Compare that with the sentiments expressed thus; *"I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Thy word. I have not turned aside from Thine ordinances, for Thou hast taught me. How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way"* (Psalm 119:101-104).

"On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Timothy 4:7). There are so many ways that self-discipline aids us in life, beginning with our assurance of reward. With the discipline comes spiritual maturity, growth, humility, meekness and modesty in heart and body. In every sense of its use, self-discipline leads directly to godliness, because it is into the image of the disciplined Christ that we must conform ourselves (Ephesians 5:1-2). What makes a Christian separate from the world is his willingness to say "no" when everybody else says "yes." *"For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ"* (Colossians 2:5). What a joyful sight it is to spend time with fellow Christians – there is no vulgar language or dirty talk, neither is there alcohol, and neither is there immodesty in speech or apparel. What sets a Christian apart is his *"stability of faith"* as a result of his self-restraint. There is no stability of faith amongst the countless throngs of opulent, vile drunkards.