

Overindulgence Can Be Deadly  
August 2, 2020  
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Proverbs 23:17-21, 29-35

The title our Explore the Bible writers chose for this lesson is “Staying Sober.” That’s because about 20% of Proverbs 23 is about the dangers of drunkenness. Now, I love Lifeway and am grateful for the material they produce, but that title doesn’t fully cover Solomon’s warnings about gluttony in this chapter. Their “big idea” statement is more accurate to the text: *“God expects believers to be good stewards of the bodies He has given them.”* Agreed!

As we look at this text we’ll see a strong warning about the abuse of alcohol and rightfully so. We’ll also see that Solomon warns us about self-control when it comes to the food we choose to eat. Many people don’t think of wise food choices as a biblical issue. “Let’s have another donut to the glory of God!” I’m going to do my best to present a balanced view based on what the text says.

So, what’s the big idea? I struggled with that. Lifeway’s statement about being good stewards of our bodies is solid, but I think this goes deeper. I thought about something like “Who is in charge, me or my appetite?” Or maybe “Where do I find my satisfaction, Jesus or junk food.” That didn’t work but it’s closer to the larger issue of why we are all tempted to overindulge in what we put into our bodies. Here is what I settled on:

Big Idea: Overindulgence in what we put into our bodies is not only unwise it can be deadly. We need God’s power to master our appetites before they master us.

Proverbs 23:17–21 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup>Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day.

<sup>18</sup>Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

<sup>19</sup>Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way.

- Solomon warns his son not to be taken in by the deceptive appeal of sin.
- Step one to avoiding temptation: continue to fear the Lord. That's been the theme of this book since chapter one. Fearing God gives a hopeful future so "be wise" and keep your heart and mind focused on that path.
- So far, so good. This isn't too controversial until verse twenty.

<sup>20</sup>Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat,  
<sup>21</sup>for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.

- This doesn't mean don't be friends with anyone who consumes alcohol. The warning is against overindulgence in both food and drink.
- A couple of disclaimers: I grew up in a very conservative home where alcohol was not used and the warnings of its dangers were prominent. It was also a home where we ate like most people in the south ate and I never got a warning about some of the bad food we consumed.
- I'm sensitive to the fact that some who are very conservative might shake their head saying I'm putting "meat" and "wine" in the same category. I didn't make them equal, Solomon did. That's the text.
- That statement might put me at risk of losing my SBC membership and being painted a liberal. As a result, I'm leaning heavily on some quotes from a commentary written by two respected and godly Southern Baptist leaders, Danny Akin and his son Jon. Danny is president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (home of the Johnny Hunt chair of preaching,) and Jon is the head of NAMB's efforts in Young Leader Engagement. Listen to what the Akins have to say about this text:

*"When was the last time you heard a sermon on gluttony? Fundamentalist Christianity, especially in the South, really loves to bash alcohol but does not want to touch gluttony...one of the big problems of fundamentalism has been condemning the sins of others while ignoring our own sins...We can give the impression that what*

*God really cares about is homosexuality, drug addictions, and wild partying, but he is not all that concerned about judgmentalism, self-righteousness, and gluttony! Gluttony is a major problem in America and in the church. It is often an avoided topic because so many of us struggle with it. We also tend to think it's just a physical issue, not really a gospel issue...the Bible is absolutely concerned with overindulgence and gluttony."* [Are you are still with me or did you log-off? Don't blame me, blame Danny and Jon!]

- Solomon warns his son not to hang out with gluttons and drunkards. If we are true to the text then we have to acknowledge the warning is about being influenced to overindulge in both food and drink.
- I'm not minimizing the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse and neither are the Akins. I've watched friends struggle with being controlled by alcohol and drugs and you have too. Many in our church have tremendous testimonies of how God delivered them from this kind of bondage.
- This chapter gives a strong warning about being controlled by alcohol (and drugs) so let's go ahead and deal with that by looking at verses 29-35 (then we'll come back to controlling our tummies. ☺)

Proverbs 23:29–35 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup>Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?

<sup>30</sup>Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine.

<sup>31</sup>Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly.

<sup>32</sup>In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder.

<sup>33</sup>Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things.

<sup>34</sup>You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast.

<sup>35</sup>"They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink."

- Those verses need no interpretation; we've all seen the tragedy of someone who is "mastered" by their addiction to mind-altering substances.
- Let's all agree that you can't become addicted (overindulgence) if you don't indulge to start with (total abstinence.) That's the safest route especially for some who are predisposed to alcohol addiction.
- Some abstain because of "witness," not wanting to make another stumble.
- Some abstain because they see alcohol consumption as unwise for them.
- Let's not put words in Solomon's mouth. The warning isn't about judging or shunning those who partake in alcohol; it's about not being influenced to overindulge.
- We need to be honest about what the Bible does and doesn't say about mind-altering substances. The scripture warns us against drunkenness (see Ephesians 5:18) and against the terrible consequences of drunkenness (today's passage and Proverbs 20:1 for example.)
- If you want the Akins thoughts on this it's in the footnotes.<sup>ii</sup> By the way, Danny Akin's position is that total abstinence is the wise course and he makes his case here: <https://www.danielakin.com/the-case-for-alcohol-abstinence/>
- To be clear addiction to alcohol and drugs is tragic and deadly.
- Let's get back to a sin we've all been guilty of at one time or another - gluttony – specifically overindulgence or poor choices in food!
- The definition of gluttony is "excess in eating and drinking; excessive indulgence." Indulging – "to yield to the desire of; to give free rein to."<sup>iii</sup>
- The CDC gives us the statistics on eating too much or unhealthy food:
- The prevalence of obesity was 42.4% in 2017~2018. [[Read CDC National Center for Health Statistics \(NCHS\) data brief](#)]
- From 1999–2000 through 2017–2018, the prevalence of obesity increased from 30.5% to 42.4% (+40%), and the prevalence of severe obesity increased from 4.7% to 9.2% (double). [[Read CDC NCHS data brief](#)]

- Obesity-related conditions include heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer that are some of the leading causes of preventable, premature death. [[Read guidelinesexternal icon](#)]<sup>iv</sup>
- [Even worse] Obesity prevalence was 13.9% among 2- to 5-year-olds, 18.4% among 6- to 11-year-olds, and 20.6% among 12- to 19-year-olds.<sup>v</sup>
- We are eating ourselves to death and teaching our kids to do the same.
- Another disclaimer: A Bible teacher who has been impacted by alcoholism might tend to lean on that warning. A teacher who has been impacted by poor eating might lean more on gluttony. My story is about parents and grandparents who suffered painful deaths due in large part to poor diet.
- Some will argue that no one was ever killed by a driver who had eaten too much or was driving under the influence of a Big Mac. Granted, food is not a psychotropic that alters mood, judgment, or mental state. That doesn't mean overindulgence or poor food choices aren't deadly.
- I watched a parent and a grandparent go through horrible things like amputations because they refused to change their relationship with food in the face of things like heart disease and diabetes.
- These were people who never consumed alcohol but they over-consumed food or consumed the wrong food and suffered as a result.
- That's why since January of 2016 we don't eat bread, grains, or sweets.
- That's the choice we've made and to many (even physicians) it's extreme. I'm not a food "shamer" or shunner, that's just what I needed to do for me.
- You don't have to do what I do in order to heed Solomon's warning, but anyone with eyes can't deny that we have an obesity crisis in America.
- How do I know if I'm overindulging? It really comes down to whether we are mastering our appetites or our appetites are mastering us. Can I practice self-control in how much and what I consume? (1 Cor.6:12)

- Appetites were given to us by God to serve us. Solomon says, when we allow our appetite to master us we are living unwisely.
- If someone can't exercise wise control of an appetite it may mean they are trying to "self-medicate." That can go beyond food and drink to include lack of self-control with money and sex as well.
- Most people don't think of gluttony with food a biblical or spiritual issue, but allowing any appetite to control us may indicate that we're not finding everything we need in Christ.
- Quoting the Akins again: *"If you have a relationship with...Jesus—it means Jesus's Spirit lives inside of you. The fruit that Jesus's Spirit produces in you includes self-control (Gal 5:22-23). If you have no self-control in the area of sex, food, or drink, it shows you are not following Jesus—not believing the gospel rightly. It is a worship issue. You find your satisfaction in created things rather than the Creator God. That is why Paul describes idolatry as worshiping the stomach as a god (Phil 3:19). You live to eat instead of eat to live. Paul says the destiny for that is destruction."*<sup>vi</sup>
- Are we finding our satisfaction in Jesus or junk food? The Akins conclude: *"...the positive strategy for battling gluttony and drunkenness is to feast on Jesus—the living water and bread from heaven. If you do that, you will live forever. Satisfaction in Christ will produce self-control so you are able to have a well-balanced diet, feast at appropriate times as a means of worship, and yes, fast to show your dependence on God rather than on bread!"*<sup>vii</sup>

### So, What's The Takeaway?

- I sure hope you're still a member of our Bible study group and haven't fled because you think I'm too hard on nutrition or soft on alcohol!
- I've tried to be balanced and accurate in looking at what Solomon said in these verses without "spinning" it to suit my own biases.
- To be clear, drunkenness is biblically wrong and a path to destruction.

- To be equally clear, Solomon’s warning was about overindulgence in both food and drink. Gluttony is also an unwise practice.
- I don’t mean to be “tongue in cheek” with all the quotes from the Akins, but I used them to show that these good, godly SBC leaders took a balanced, honest approach to overcome the stereotype that conservative Christians warn against drunkenness and joke about gluttony.
- As usual, I was convicted by this lesson before you read or heard it because I struggle with controlling my appetites as much as anyone.
- Let’s face it, we ALL struggle with mastering our appetites instead of being mastered by them and the ultimate answer is the power of God.
- This week, let’s ask Him for supernatural self-control in every aspect of our lives from food and drink to sex, money, and emotions.
- Remember, fearing God gives us a hopeful future so let’s “be wise” and keep our hearts and minds focused on Him and His wisdom about what we take into our bodies.

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<sup>i</sup> Akin, Jonathan. Exalting Jesus in Proverbs (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> *“As we walk through these verses let’s be honest about what the Bible says and submit to it. The Bible does not condemn the consumption of alcohol in moderation (though the principles of wisdom and witness in our cultural context may lead us to abstain); it condemns the overuse of it.”<sup>ii</sup>*

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>

<sup>vi</sup> Akin, Jonathan. Exalting Jesus in Proverbs (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) . B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>vii</sup> *ibid*