

# Love of Pleasure Posing as Love of God

Proverbs 21:17

**He who loves bliss *shall be* a man in want;  
he who loves wine and oil shall not accrue *assets*.**

## Words of the Verse:

"Bliss" is from the Hebrew word used most often for "joy" in a good sense, including spiritual joy.

## Analysis of the Verse:

### Complements:

- One who loves joy
- One who loves wine and oil

### Their Consequences:

- Shall be a man in lack
- Shall not accumulate

## Teaching of the Verse:

Ever heard of a young lady who was "in love with being in love"? She wanted romance in her life, and of course a boy was necessary for the transaction to be completed, so, though she found a lad she was awfully fond of, it really wasn't according to plan to get too serious about him. He would find himself on the curb with some coming morning's trash when she thought it inconsiderate to string him along any further.

God didn't make romance to be a roller coaster ride with which to

amuse ourselves. Romance is part of a whole experience of joining with a life partner. It is exciting, but if the excitement itself becomes primary, more important factors are going to get mislaid to the lovers' detriments. Unfortunately, the romance game in our culture plays into the hands of this very kind of abuse.

Our proverb today says something very similar about joy. Joy is a good thing too. We can go further than that and say that joy is a necessary thing:

**Phil 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, Rejoice!

But according to our proverb, we must add this caveat. Joy in the Lord can turn into *joy for its own sake*. In fact, sin is so deceptive that *any* aspect of our relationship with God can turn into empty form with no spiritual life:

**2 Tim 3:5** having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it.

And it is plain that some people seek a relationship with God for the *sensation* they receive from it:

**Rev 3:1** And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars says these things. I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead.

Yes, they had lively churches in the first century too.

The gift of tongues was an example of a pleasurable spiritual gift with which a believer could "edify himself", as Paul told the Corinthians. But his whole message to them in 1 Corinthians 12 - 14 was that the spiritual gifts' primary purpose was not personal pleasure, but edifying the rest of the body of Christ with intelligible messages from God. Therefore, prophecy, a gift for teaching, was superior to tongues.

The Corinthians apparently had a similar type of lively worship service as those in Sardis. Paul came pretty close to telling them, like Jesus told Sardis, that their worship was dead. If they them-

selves were spiritually alive, their worship had degenerated into selfish pleasure-seeking and showmanship. Paul walked a judicious line in admonishing them, because he did not want to imply that anything was wrong with the gift of tongues or that he begrudged them the pleasure it gave. At the same time, he left no alternatives to his new worship guidelines, which were very strict compared with the Corinthians' existing free-for-all. No one could object, "But the Spirit told me to do it this way," because the Spirit had just given His final word through an Apostle.

Apparently, loving any thing or any sensation is dangerous. "The love of money" is the starting place for any other kind of sin ( 1 Tim 6:10). Money is necessary and good in itself, but once we love it, we commit idolatry. So with the love of any thing.

We are certainly supposed to love people, though even that love can easily lapse into idolatry.

The principle behind today's proverb is that the love of God must be our truly supreme love and pleasure, or any other love will by definition be idolatry. We are shown how easily we slip into idolatry in that even an emotion we are commanded to continually experience- joy- can become its own god and rule us to our hurt.

Solomon is obviously not restricting the idea of joy to religious joy. Anything that gives man elation would be similar. The **love** of it is idolatry.

Are we supposed to tone down our joy? No. As long as our joy is exclusively IN the Lord, there is no danger of an excess. In fact:

1 Pet 1:8 whom [Jesus Christ] not having known you love; in whom, though now you don't see him, yet believing, you rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory –

But notice that even here Peter puts our inexpressible joy UNDER the greater heading of love for Christ.

In the second half of the proverb, Solomon transitions from love

of an emotion experienced to love of luxury items. Wine and oil are good gifts from God, but loving them is an improper use of them.

And what are the consequences for this improper love? It impoverishes us and keeps us from accumulating resources we need.

Anyone who tunes life to his pleasure sensors is never going to get enough. He will end up in a fruitless chase to match or exceed his previous experiences of gratification. Everything that comes into his hands will only be consumed as part of a constant pursuit of enjoyment.

Spiritually, the shortage is most serious:

2 Tim 3:4, 5 traitors, reckless, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it; even turn away from these.

Because pleasure was their true love, they had a shortage of the love of God. They could only possess a *sham* love for God (not sham in their own eyes, of course). Paul says these professing Christians are to be denied our fellowship.

Most of modern Christianity is in need of self-examination according to today's proverb.

- Excitement and enjoyment are key elements in most modern worship. Many people would not come if they were denied the entertaining aspects. God's OK to them IF He's entertaining.
- Much of the ceremonial type of worship is also pleasure-seeking, but its pleasure derives from atmosphere: candles, uniforms, solemn gestures, etc.
- Much of the Bible-studying segment of the Church derives pleasure from gaining inspiring insights- without any transformation of life.

All told, our **plenty** as Americans has bled over into our worship and made us lovers of things and sensations masquerading as love of God.