

# **Drowsiness Shall Clothe a Man With Rags**

*Proverbs 23:20-21*

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*“Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.” - Proverbs 23:20, 21.*

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One of the “BIG” problems that Solomon emphasizes throughout the Book of Proverbs is the need and responsibility we have as men (not as males but as people) to be consistently and productively at work, doing those things which enables us to be providing both for ourselves and for the families which God has given us. He speaks of many detriments to that task and we see one of them here - the matter of self-indulgence in the matters of what would, today, be called “partying”. Over drinking and over eating, especially in the self-serving sense can be, and most often are (when indulged in habitually) are extremely damaging and hurtful to ones’ life and his ability be the “kind” of man/husband/family person God desires them to be.

One of the interesting things about these couple verses is that the first few words in the verse are not only speaking about staying out of the local tavern. The two are speaking of seeing to it that we do not mix ourselves with those around us who are of the character spoken of. The form of the word is what is called in Hebrew the “Jussive” and speaks of becoming something, to allow to be a thing or a state. Here we can see that it is commanding us to be sure that we are NOT among the group mentioned. “Be not among”. Solomon is not just speaking of the undesirability of the ones mentioned. He is telling us that we both can do so and ought to see to it that this quality shows itself in our lives.

Solomon then goes on and mentions a couple things that we can and should see to it that we are not “among”. Biblically, a “winebibber” is seen as those who drink too much wine. The Bible warns not against BEING one, but also against even associating with such persons (as here in Prov. 23:20). It is interesting that Jesus’ enemies accused Him of being a winebibber (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34; the word is “drunkard” in the NIV). Unlike John the Baptist, who “came neither eating bread nor drinking wine” (Luke 7:33), Jesus is said to be one who “came eating and drinking” (Matt. 11:18). His association with those who ate and drank freely brought the rebuke of the religious leaders who had decided to get rid of Him.

With this in mind, it is interesting that Solomon tells us: *“Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh”*. Given the larger context and that in which Jesus preached the Gospel, we need to be careful exactly how we both interpret and apply these words. The matter is surely that, not merely of the larger associations, especially those in which we walk and share the Gospel as that is precisely the way Jesus lived His life and shared the Gospel.

It might be profitable for us to think about the general matter of what the Bible calls “drunkenness” for a moment:

In a “technical” sense, the Bible portrays drunkenness as a drugged or deranged condition that results from drinking intoxicating beverages (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:10; Eph. 5:18). The beverages in view can either be wine OR what it calls “strong drink”, what we might think of as hard liquor. Drunkenness regularly appears in lists of vices in the New Testament (Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21).

- The great and famous servant of God, Noah, who planted a vineyard and drank its wine after the Flood, is the first intoxicated man mentioned in the Bible (Gen. 9:20–21).
- We’re told that after God sent angelic beings to rescue him from the destructive judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and while intoxicated, Lot fathered sons by his daughters (Gen. 19:32–38).
- Also, after the coming of God’s Holy Spirit, people thought the Apostles were drunk on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:15)
- Also drunkenness was apparently a problem in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 11:21).

Drunkenness was a well-known enough matter that there were “common symptoms” associated with drunkenness and mentioned in the Bible. They include

- The drunkard and his songs (Ps. 69:12),
- His reeling and staggering (Job 12:25; Jer. 23:9),
- His vomiting (Is. 28:8; Jer. 25:27; 48:26), and
- His drugged condition (Joel 1:5).

Drunkenness is also spoken of figuratively in the Bible to describe a helpless people whose ways have brought them punishment from the Lord (Is. 29:9; Jer. 13:13; Ezek. 23:33). Symbolically, one may also be drunk from the Lord’s fury (Is. 63:6; Jer. 25:27; Lam. 4:21) and the “wine” of fornication (Rev. 17:2).

It seems certain that, one of the intentions the Bible held in its’ use of the picture of drunkenness is to stimulate the children of God, those seeking to please Him and grow in spiritual living, is to keep themselves separate from any indulgence in it. This is for both testimony’s sake as well as for abilities sake that the believe can put forth and demonstrate the reality and power of the knowledge of the Lord.

Just to underscore our interpretation here - In the East, where meat is more rarely eaten than with us, to devour much meat would be stigmatized as intemperance, no less than to drink much wine. The habit of luxurious feasting is in this Proverbs passage cautioned by Solomon against as involving wasteful expenditure, and inducing intemperate and damaging habits, which are fatal to success in any area of life. They are also, plainly, hurtful to ones’ testimony and accomplishment in service of the Lord.

As we can virtually always see, there are a number of illustrations for us to have to help us more fully grasp what Solomon has in mind:

- Solomon himself would seem to have fallen into the habits he here warns against (Eccles. 2:1–3). And he woke from his dream of folly to find his glory gone.
- The gluttonous craving of the Israelites for flesh (Num. 11:10, etc.),
- The riotous excesses of the Corinthian converts (1 Cor. 11:21), are held up in Scripture for our warning, as tending to evil, temporal and spiritual.
- The Apostle Paul made a noble resolution to avoid the scandal of eating flesh which might perchance have been offered to an idol (1 Cor. 8:13),
- He likewise resolved to keep under his body and bring it into subjection (1 Cor. 9:27).

By way of application we can say that while the evils of drunkenness proclaim themselves loudly, there is such a thing as *intemperance* both in food and drink which is far too little thought of. One writer spoke of what can be called a “gormandizer” - a poetic sort of word that is virtually NEVER used in English any longer. The word “Gormandize” entered English in the mid-1500s as a modification of gourmand, a term borrowed from the French that served as a synonym of glutton. The meaning of gourmand softened over time, developing in the mid-18th century a sense referring to one who is "heartily interested in good food and drink."

In Solomon’s time (as well as in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries), a intemperate gormandizer, a driveling sot, would be shut out of all good society. But society welcomes to its halls the *bon vivant* (one who “lives well”) as such who lives for “*the pleasures of the table;*” and is a connoisseur of meats and drinks. In a humbler class of life, the habits of such a man would be condemned unsparingly as likely to lead to vice and ruin.

This entry in the Word of God condemns them equally in all classes, INTERESTINGLY not only for what they lead to, but for what they are. I am cautioned in this passage to avoid the company of such as are “given to appetite.” For their luxurious feastings are in themselves excess, and will probably know no bounds. To eat too much, to love eating, to be over nice about it, is as much gluttony as to drink too much (although it stops short of intoxication) is still not truly being sober. Both the one and the other is intemperance. It is most clearly at least one of the reasons that lie behind AA and their insistence that their adherents be completely abstaining from any partaking. The slightest partaking is a negative thing and is damaging to the habits and thinking of the one who is seeking to quit.

We can see, very directly, that indolence, the lack of proper occupation, is of these habits spoken of both cause and effect. Let my mind and my time be well occupied, and I shall be content to eat and drink only that I may live, having higher objects to live for. But sensuality, besides engrossing too much time and thought, will tend to stupefy and enfeeble the powers which the

business of life demands. I may easily thus come, in a literal sense of the words, to poverty and rags. How much more in a spiritual sense!