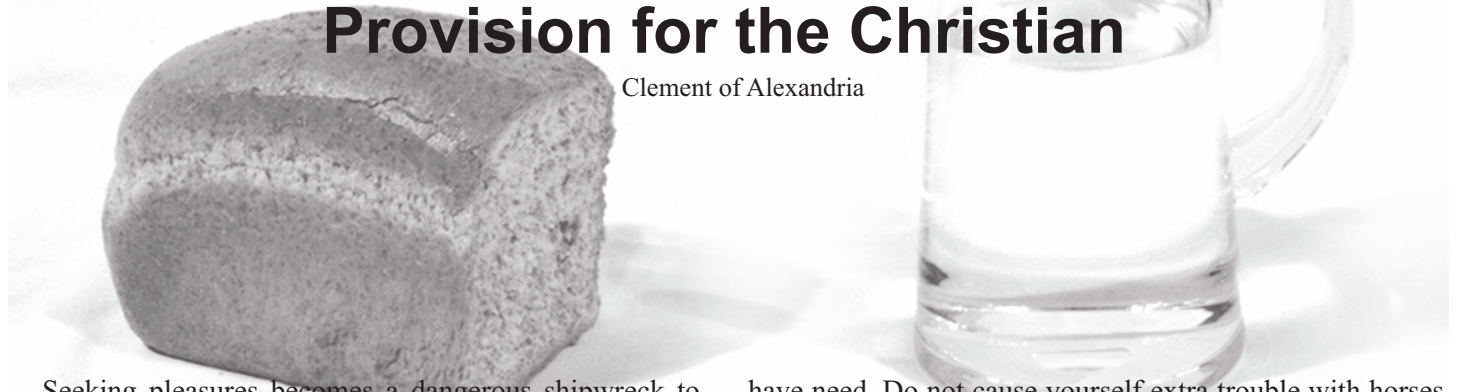


VOICES FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Frugality: A Good Provision for the Christian

Clement of Alexandria



Seeking pleasures becomes a dangerous shipwreck to men; for this luxurious and dishonorable life that so many seek is alien to true love for the beautiful and for the best pleasures. For man is by nature an erect and majestic being, aspiring after the good, as is proper for a creature of The One. But the life which crawls on its belly is destitute of dignity, is scandalous, hateful, and ridiculous.

And to the godly nature, living for good feelings in the body is a thing most alien; it is like a man to imitate sparrows in feeding or pigs and goats in reproduction. For to regard sensual pleasure as a thing to strive for is the sign of utter ignorance of what is excellent.

Love of wealth removes a man from an upright manner of life, and entices him to stop feeling shame at what is shameful. If he could only, like an animal, eat and drink all sorts of things and gratify in every way his lewd desires! Very rarely does such a person inherit the kingdom of God.

Why do we fix such dainty dishes, only to fill one belly? The filthiness of gluttony is proved by the sewers into which our bellies discharge the unused portions of our food. Why do the rich have so many cupbearers, when they might satisfy themselves with one cup? Why the closets full of clothes? And the adornments ... why? Those things are prepared for thieves, and crooks, and for greedy eyes.

Look, for instance, to Elijah the Tishbite, in whom we have a beautiful example of frugality, when he sat down beneath the thorn tree and the angel brought him food. "It was a cake of barley and a jar of water." 1 Ki. 19:4-6 This is what the Lord sent, knowing what was best for him.

We, then, on our journey to the truth, must be unencumbered. "Carry not," said the Lord, "purse, nor scrip, nor shoes." Lu. 10:4 That is, possess not wealth, which is only treasured up in a purse; fill not your own storage bins, as if hoarding up supplies in a bag, but share with those who

have need. Do not cause yourself extra trouble with horses and servants, who—as carrying the extra supplies when the rich are travelling—are allegorically called "shoes" in Luke 10:4.

We must, then, cast away the multitude of vessels, silver and gold drinking cups, and the crowd of domestic servants, receiving from the Teacher the beautiful and sober servants: Self-help and Simplicity. We must walk conformably to the Word. If we have a wife and children, having a house should not become a burden; they need to learn to fit into their place in the life of a sound-minded traveler. The wife who loves her husband must be furnished for travel through this life just like her husband is. A sufficient provision for the journey to heaven belongs to those who take frugality and chaste seriousness along with them.

As the foot is the measure of the shoe, so also the "size" of the body is an indicator of what each person needs. But whatever is extra—mere ornaments and excess stuff of the rich—is really a burden, not an ornament to the body. **He who climbs to the heavens by force must take with him the beautiful walking stick of generosity**, and attain to the true rest by sharing with those who are in distress.

Just like gushing wells rise again to their former level when pumped out, so giving away and sharing a drink to the thirsty (since this is the compassionate spring of love) refills the supply again, and the well is replenished. It works in the same way that milk flows into the breasts that are sucked or milked. For he who has the almighty God, the Word, is in need of nothing, and never is in a hard place because of what he lacks.

This Word, who trains us, gives us the true riches. Nor is getting materially rich something desirable to those who possess—through Him—the privilege of lacking nothing. He that has *this* wealth shall inherit the kingdom of God!~