

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Step Three: To Knowledge Temperance

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5–9, KJV 1900)*

"Temperance" is not a word that we hear used every day, but most of us generally understand the word. The older among us will recall reading or hearing our older relatives talk about the era of alcoholic temperance movements of the early twentieth century. They failed, and so did the attitude of true "Temperance" toward alcohol among many in our culture. The word translated "Temperance" in this passage is defined as follows:

...to exercise complete control over one's desires and actions—to control oneself, to exercise self-control, self-control.<sup>1</sup>

The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines the English word:

Rational self-restraint; the practice or habit of exercising self-control or moderation. ME.

B. Whitelocke It pleased God to give me much patience and temperance to beare this...ingratitude. H. E. Manning Temperance is the excellence of the will in controlling the passion for pleasure.

Clearly, the word conveys the idea of control over one's appetites and/or emotions. How often in our culture do we hear or read such thoughts as "I know I should...but I just can't help..." The "Can't help it" mindset represents a mirror opposite to Biblical temperance. When someone gives me the "Can't help it" routine, I am strongly inclined to ask why. Is their inclination to do what they admittedly know to be wrong so strong that even the Holy Spirit cannot aid them in their resistance? Does God choose to stand apart from them, leaving them without the power to overcome that behavior? Of course, there is also the equally self-indulgent attitude, "This is just the way I am, and I have no intention of

changing." I'd like to meet the believer who has arrived at such a state of spiritual and moral maturity that he/she needs no change. I've met a few folks who make this allegation, but never anyone who actually measured up to their inflated self-assessment. In fact, I've encountered this attitude so many times that I've developed something of a reputation for telling preachers, "Never believe your own press releases."

To grasp this Biblical principle of temperance, we need to expand the idea far beyond any one appetite. It applies to every appetite and habit in our life. There is an intimate corollary between "self-control" and "self-denial," Jesus' primary criteria for being a disciple. However, we need to observe that we do not in fact maintain our own "self-control" over our appetites and sinful desires within our broken, fallen, human nature. In the new birth, the Holy Spirit changes our being, writes God's law in our hearts and minds, and permanently indwells us. We are now truly a "...new creature," a new creation in the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17) That new creation in Christ is not the same as that old, totally depraved sinner. A believer in Christ should never refer to self as being no different than he/she was prior to the new birth. To do so utterly rejects and contradicts the teachings of Scripture regarding the powerful change that God effects in us by the new birth.

Occasionally, perhaps due to a lack of understanding the Scripture, or perhaps due to a faulty understanding of Scripture, sincere believers will refer to the "Flesh" part or the "Spirit" part of them, as if two autonomous beings live inside their one physical body. While Scripture obviously teaches that we shall contend with these conflicting interests till we go to the Lord in glory, Scripture does not teach that such a dichotomy exists between the two. Consider just one passage for clarification of the point.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God *in*

<sup>1</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 750 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

**your body**, and in your spirit, which are God's.  
(1 Corinthians 6:19-20; emphasis added)

Notice the obvious point of Paul's teaching. Because of what God has done to us and in us, making our body the temple of the Holy Ghost, "...which is in you, which ye have of God," we do not belong to ourselves to do as we wish. We now belong to God. As His child, bought with a precious price, soul, body, and spirit, Paul commands us to glorify God, not only with our spirit, but also **with our body**, which is no less God's than our spirit.

Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. (Philippians 4:5 KJV 1900)

The word "moderation" in this verse is defined as—

...pertaining to being gracious and forbearing—  
'gentle, gracious, forbearing.' ...'not to speak evil of anyone, nor to be quarrelsome, but to be forbearing' Tt 3:2.<sup>2</sup>

Commentaries occasionally refer to the sense of this word as "Sweet reasonableness," reasonableness being measured by the Holy Spirit whose conviction urges our godly obedience, "...which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1) Moderation relates closely to temperance.

We so easily fall into extreme postures and attitudes that feed the sinful spirit within. Being a faithful believer in Christ and living according to the teachings of Scripture distinctly insulates us from the attitudes and norms of the dark world around us, but Scripture never exempts us to become so eccentric in our personalities or quirks of behavior as to discredit our faith-walk. The Christian life, commanded and measured by the Holy Spirit and always harmoniously affirmed by Scripture, directs us to that sense of "Sweet reasonableness," a truly "reasonable" service when measured by the Holy Spirit and by Scripture.

In every facet of life for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, we face the constant need to maintain this quality of Biblical temperance. A preacher may become so immersed in his study of a particular Bible doctrine that, for a season, he preaches on little else. Even if what he preaches is true, hungry sheep need a balanced diet. Could we call it a "Temperate" diet, well balanced in a variety of spiritual nutrients?

Occasionally I encounter caring, godly people who become so immersed in the political scene of the day and its growing danger to a Biblical faith and a Biblical worldview that they will talk about little other than the latest moral, political disaster

and its danger to the faith. Do we live in perilous times for Bible believers? Yes indeed we do. However, the solution to this radical, immoral trend is not obsessing about it. Our balanced, "Temperate," response is to keep our minds immersed in Scripture and to do what Scripture teaches, to speak "...often with one another..." (Malachi 3:16) Obsessing about the latest claim of yet another conspiracy against godliness, about recent legislation, or a presidential executive order does little to remedy the problem. No, we need not ignore the moral decay of the world around us, but neither does Scripture permit us to obsess over it to the sad neglect of Biblical temperance. Paul will remind us that our "conversation," a word that, in its New Testament context, means our whole "Citizenship," or manner of life, not merely the words that we speak, is from heaven, from whence we daily expect and look for the Savior. (Philippians 3:20; observe that Paul uses this same word in Philippians 1:27, commanding us to "let..." that conversation be so guided and controlled by the Scriptures as to become the faith of the gospel)

Christians lived through the inhumane persecutions of their own countrymen in the Dark Ages in Western Europe. They endured these persecutions by drawing closer to their Savior, not by obsessing about the corruption of the government under which they lived. Think. The next time you are engaged in conversation with another believer, take note of the topics that you are discussing. Are you talking about God, His merciful goodness, and the teachings of Scripture, or about the latest political history or commentary that you read? As you assess the conversation, do you strive to return the topic to your political reflections, or do you leap heartily into the discussion of Scripture and of the Lord's kind grace? In short, do we manifest Biblical temperance or do we avoid it? As you engage in these conversations, do you find yourself longing to go back to a discussion of your latest political studies, or do you long to refresh your soul in meditation and conversation about God and His revelation in Scripture?

The culture in which we live, that our heirs shall inherit, is indeed important, and we should do what we can do honorably to leave a godly footprint on it for them. However, our best means to impact them is by our constantly living our lives within the bounds of Biblical truth and temperance.

Peter drives his point home. As we grow in grace and knowledge, that knowledge should cultivate spiritual temperance in us, the "Sweet reasonableness" of our Lord Jesus Christ and His grace. At the end of the day, what message do we leave to those around us about our personal spiritual treasure? Will they think that we cannot get past our private ideas that we try to impose on all around us? Or will they recall our rich, tender conversation about the Lord and His goodness, the heart of Biblical temperance?

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 748 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

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