

An Appeal for Temperance

Let's begin this article with a brief refresher about the power of sin.

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. *(Romans 7:11-13 KJV)*

The exceeding sinfulness of sin is found in its ability to use something good to destroy our souls. The commandments are holy, just, and good, but sin took the opportunity to inspire us with all manner of evil desires contrary to the law. It deceived us into doing evil and destroyed us, using that which is good: the law. Paul writes:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. *(Romans 7:18-19 KJV)*

Paul highlights the struggle of a man that is without Christ and sold to sin. This means that in the past he has yielded his body to pursue sinful desires, those which are contrary to God's law. Now he is subject to the law of sin. He says:

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. *(Romans 7:21 KJV)*

Peter comments on a group of people that were subject to this law. He writes:

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. *(2 Peter 2:19 KJV)*

When sin overcomes us, we are brought into bondage to it and must be rescued. Jesus is the Saviour of man and the only one that can rescue us from the bondage of sin.

Sin Before Law

The focus of Romans seven is the relationship between the law, sin, and the lost condition of man. Before this, Paul describes the power of sin before the law was given. He writes:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the

world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. *(Romans 5:12-14 KJV)*

The sinful tendencies and desires are inherited from the father. Genesis makes this plain:

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth. *(Genesis 5:1-3 KJV)*

Adam's children were born in his likeness and image, this means that they were partakers of Adam's fallen nature and mortality, but not Adam's sin. Each of Adam's children sinned in their own ways, because "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Thus the wages of sin, eternal death, passed upon them for their own individual choices. Even though there was no law, sin was in the world and it ruled over the sons of men until Moses. We ask how? The Bible tells us;

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. *(Genesis 6:5 KJV)*

Nearly four thousand years later, Jesus revealed what this wickedness was.

And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. *(Luke 17:26-29 KJV)*

Both of these instances of divine justice have something in common. They occurred before Mo-

2 ses and the law. What were the evil actions they pursued? Eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting, and building. Ezekiel tells us:

Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. (*Ezekiel 16:49 KJV*)

In fact, intemperance in marriage had become such that even the professed children of God “took them wives of all which they chose.” Genesis 6:2. Noah was seen righteous because he did not partake in the prevailing intemperance. Eating, drinking, building, planting, and marrying are all good things, but through sin they were carried to excess. Sin destroyed Sodom, Gomorrah, and the Antediluvians with good things that God had blessed.

The Sin of Intemperance

When Jesus speaks of His return, He tells us that it will be a time when there is intemperance in eating, drinking, buying, selling, marrying, planting, and building. But what makes something a matter of intemperance? At what point does something good become sin? The answer is rather simple. When good things interfere with the mission and eternal interests that Christ has entrusted to us, when they harm the temple of the Holy Spirit—our bodies, or when our pursuit of these things hurts others.

In our day the heart of man is set on casting off all restraint. Marriage is being carried to excess; men and women are marrying three, four and even seven times. The practice of the duties and blessings of marriage are also carried to excess until they become a curse and waste away the vigor of life. The organs are forced to minister to lust through intemperance in eating. The world is filled with those who graze like cattle, but even cattle take a rest! People no longer eat for strength but for pleasure and taste. Then there are those who partake freely in sugary drinks, burdening the liver and kidneys. For the lust of the eyes, many foods are dyed with harmful substances. The eye itself is never satisfied with seeing, and with TikTok, Facebook, Youtube, and Television there is enough to keep it occupied for thousands of years. We must also beware of intemperance in hearing. There are thousands of hours of content to keep the eye fascinated, and millions of hours of audio to make the ears tingle and the heart drunk. There is, of course, a class that shuns such activities. And sin poisons them with intemperance in reading, which Ellen

White says is a species of intoxication.

Intemperance in study is a species of intoxication; and those who indulge in it, like the drunkard, wander from safe paths and stumble and fall in the darkness. The Lord would have every student bear in mind that the eye must be kept single to the glory of God. He is not to exhaust and waste his physical and mental powers in seeking to acquire all possible knowledge of the sciences, but is to preserve the freshness and vigor of all his powers to engage in the work which the Lord has appointed him in helping souls to find the path of righteousness. (*Great Controversy*, pg. 396)

Is studying the Bible good? Then you can be sure that sin will seek to entice you to carry it to excess. We must keep the eye single to the glory of God—single to the mission of spreading the Gospel—single to the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (*1 Corinthians 10:31 KJV*)

Should we think ourselves safe from intemperance, sin is crafty enough to take us to the opposite extreme. Intemperance can lead us to overindulgence, or to neglect. The antediluvians neglected to take the opportunity to enter the ark. The sons of Lot neglected their opportunity to escape Sodom. The wife of Lot neglected to appreciate God’s grace. Talents neglected and opportunities slighted are also the work of sin through intemperance. Intemperance can be too much, OR too little, of something good.

Consider how powerful the temptations of Christ must have been. He was the embodiment of goodness, and thus His temptations to intemperance were far greater than what ours would be. Yet, He was never intemperate because He never deviated from the will of His Heavenly Father. Notice this fascinating record:

To the heart of Christ it was a bitter task to press His way against the fears, disappointment, and unbelief of His beloved disciples. It was hard to lead them forward to the anguish and despair that awaited them at Jerusalem. And Satan was at hand to press his temptations upon the Son of man. Why should He now go to Jerusalem, to certain death? All around Him were souls hungering for the bread of life. On every hand were suffering ones waiting for His word of healing. The work to be wrought by the gospel of His grace was but just begun. And He was full of the vigor of manhood’s prime. Why not go forward to the vast fields of the world

with the words of His grace, the touch of His healing power? Why not take to Himself the joy of giving light and gladness to those darkened and sorrowing millions? Why leave the harvest gathering to His disciples, so weak in faith, so dull of understanding, so slow to act? Why face death now, and leave the work in its infancy? The foe who in the wilderness had confronted Christ assailed Him now with fierce and subtle temptations. Had Jesus yielded for a moment, had He changed His course in the least particular to save Himself, Satan's agencies would have triumphed, and the world would have been lost.

But Jesus had "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." The one law of His life was the Father's will. In the visit to the temple in His boyhood, He had said to Mary, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" Luke 2:49. At Cana, when Mary desired Him to reveal His miraculous power, His answer was, "Mine hour is not yet come." John 2:4. With the same words He replied to His brothers when they urged Him to go to the feast. But in God's great plan the hour had been appointed for the offering of Himself for the sins of men, and that hour was soon to strike. He would not fail nor falter. His steps are turned toward Jerusalem, where His foes have long plotted to take His life; now He will lay it down. He set His face steadfastly to go to persecution, denial, rejection, condemnation, and death. (*Desire of Ages*, pg. 486)

Satan tempted Christ to delay obeying the will of His Father to perform good deeds. It was a fierce and subtle temptation that tried to prey on the infinite goodness in Christ. The temptation failed, and through Christ's victory we are strengthened to overcome all forms of intemperance.

Protecting Yourself from Intemperance

How can we protect ourselves from intemperance? There is only one way to escape the power of sin, and that is through Christ. We must claim the promises of God and cast ourselves at His feet. Has he not promised to give us grace and help in time of need?

If you would truly be free from intemperance, there is a part you must play. Habits are a key to victory. Schedule your time, make it a habit, then don't break it. Start with the most important things in life, Bible study, prayer, sleep, meals, chores, outreach and work. During your prayer time ask God to give you ideas for outreach that you can incorporate into your daily schedule. Time yourself when you do your daily duties.

This way you can constantly be improving your skills in the little things. Nobody is so old they cannot do things more quickly and efficiently. **3**

When opportunities to do good come your way, schedule them. You may even be able to defer certain non-essential things to take advantage of opportunities sooner. Certain things in the schedule can always be canceled or moved around. The habit we are developing is not to follow a rigid schedule, but to keep ourselves from becoming intemperate in something. If we have things planned, we are less likely to spend our time intemperately. Idleness plows the heart for wickedness.

God tests and proves us by the common occurrences of life. It is the little things which reveal the chapters of the heart. It is the little attentions, the numerous small incidents and simple courtesies of life that make up the sum of life's happiness; and it is the neglect of kindly, encouraging, affectionate words, and the little courtesies of life, which helps compose the sum of life's wretchedness. The self-denials for the good and happiness of those around us, will be found to constitute a large share of the life record in Heaven. And the care of self irrespective of others' good and happiness, will reveal the fact that none of these things are beneath the notice of our Heavenly Father. (*2 Testimonies*, pg. 133)

Self denial requires self control and temperance. The Bible tells us that temperance is a fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (*Galatians 5:22-23 KJV*)

None will have much spiritual growth without exercising this precious gift. Peter tells us:

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. (*2 Peter 1:5-7 KJV*)

Knowledge is useless if we don't put it into practice through the power of the Holy Spirit and personal effort. This can be seen in a powerful allegory that came to my attention this morning.

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? (*Ezekiel 15:1-3 KJV*)

4 Is a grape vine good for wood? Can you build a house with it? Can you use it for shelving? It's twisted, bent, and weak. Yet the vine brings one of the greatest blessings to man if it bears fruit. The antioxidant resveratrol is contained in grape skin, and it is highly medicinal. Grapes are also sweet and energizing.

God has ordained for us to bear fruit to bless others. We are twisted, bent, and weak through intemperance. Daily, we are showered with blessings from heaven. We can spend these gifts on ourselves, growing big, fat, long, and covering ourselves with pretentious leaves, while being good for nothing but to be burned. Or, we can exercise the gift of temperance—we can bear fruit that blesses others and glorifies God.

Conclusion

Paul writing to the Corinthians held before them the illustration of running a race. We read:

“In the hope of impressing vividly upon the minds of the Corinthian believers the importance of firm self-control, strict temperance, and unflagging zeal in the service of Christ, Paul in his letter to them made a striking comparison between the Christian warfare and the celebrated foot races held at stated intervals near Corinth. Of all the games instituted among the Greeks and the Romans, the foot races were the most ancient and the most highly esteemed. They were witnessed by kings, nobles, and statesmen. Young men of rank and wealth took part in them and shrank from no effort or discipline necessary to obtain the prize.

The contests were governed by strict regulations, from which there was no appeal. Those who desired their names entered as competitors for the prize had first to undergo a severe preparatory training. Harmful indulgence of appetite, or any other gratification that would lower mental or physical vigor, was strictly forbidden. For one to have any hope of success in these trials of strength and speed, the muscles must be strong and supple, and the nerves well under control. Every movement must be certain, every step swift and unswerving; the physical powers must reach the highest mark. As the contestants in the race made their appearance before the waiting multitude, their names were heralded, and the rules of the race were distinctly stated. Then they all started together, the fixed attention of the spectators

inspiring them with a determination to win. The judges were seated near the goal, that they might watch the race from its beginning to its close and give the prize to the true victor. If a man reached the goal first by taking an unlawful advantage, he was not awarded the prize.

In these contests great risks were run. Some never recovered from the terrible physical strain. It was not unusual for men to fall on the course, bleeding at the mouth and nose, and sometimes a contestant would drop dead when about to seize the prize. But the possibility of lifelong injury or of death was not looked upon as too great a risk to run for the sake of the honor awarded the successful contestant.

As the winner reached the goal, the applause of the vast multitude of onlookers rent the air and awoke the echoes of the surrounding hills and mountains. In full view of the spectators, the judge presented him with the emblems of victory—a laurel crown and a palm branch to carry in his right hand. His praise was sung throughout the land; his parents received their share of honor; and even the city in which he lived was held in high esteem for having produced so great an athlete. (*Acts of the Apostles, pg. 309-310*)

All this risk and effort, yet only one would take home the crown. Paul writes:

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. (*1 Corinthians 9:25 KJV*)

In the race of eternal life, everyone who strives and reaches the mark of the high calling in Christ receives a reward. Nobody is overlooked. We are not competing against others, but against self. There is a crown awaiting everyone who will exercise temperance and run the race with patience. What a compassionate God we have the privilege of calling “Father.”

For a finished work,

Jonathan Taylor

Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35

More Food for the Little Flock —