

Temperance

The Road To Victory

In God's outlines found in many places in the Bible, the first and last item is usually of exceptional importance. And so, in His great outline of what should be seen in the Christian as the Fruit of the Spirit, He begins with "love" and concludes with "temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23).

The word "temperance" has suffered badly from misuse in recent generations. To many, it means little more than abstaining from liquor. Yet Scripture uses the word as a very important part of the behavior pattern expected of the Christian, "to be temperate in ALL things?"

Too often, the Christian who is the most vocal in their criticism of someone who drinks too heavily will be the one most guilty of a lack of temperance in something else.

There is such a great need for all of us to be at our very best at all times, and to live an active and fruitful Christian life until the Lord sees fit to take us Home. It is a very sobering thought that many thousands of people who could have been won for Christ were never even approached because millions of Christians enjoy fellowship dinners so much more than they do soul-winning. Call a dinner meeting for most any Christian group and you have a splendid turnout. Call a prayer meeting for even an urgent need and you get only a handful of faithful members. Is it possible that God will wink at this when there is such a horrible price in lost souls being paid for such selfishness on the part of His people?

This is not a popular subject. Folks would rather have us write and talk more about Love. Love is surely the most important part of our Christian life. But as the apostle James puts it: "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone," and again, "show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." If a Christian really has love for his neighbor, it will show in his burden of prayer and his every act to do his utmost to love that neighbor into the kingdom of God. If one wastes his physical assets and his time in the pursuit of pleasure, whether it be food, liquor, hobbies, sports or even overwork, with the result that one has little time or energy for real fruit-bearing, then the only kind of love such works show is love of self!

The sin is one of robbing the Lord of the opportunity of using your body as "a living sacrifice" which He can use to the full extent of His pleasure in drawing precious souls unto Himself. He reminds us that "ye are not your own, you are bought with a price" and yet most of us go on seeking the most comfortable way to wait out His coming! And when He comes, "will He find faith on the earth?" If Christ is our daily delight and our keenest desire is to please Him, not ourselves, we'll start each day with the joy of His presence, and enter in the day's activities with the prayer, "Lord, what wilt THOU have me to do?" He has much for you to do, and if it is done by fully yielding to His indwelling Holy Spirit, it will bear much fruit. Dare the Christian who wants to be all this to his Master, spoil it with any kind of over-indulgence?

Over-indulgence in sports, entertainment, hobbies, and many other things brand the Christian as one who has relegated the things of the Lord to a secondary place in his life. We can even be guilty of tearing down our bodies and giving them far too little rest with so much Christian activity that we've again been disobedient to the One Who said, "Come ye apart and rest a while and Who set up the one day in each week for real rest and true worship. Being "temperate in ALL things" means just that.

Paul likened the Christian's challenge to that of the Olympic star who disciplined his body so that he could run the race to win the prize! Ours is a glorious prize for which to run; precious jewels to make up His crown! Golden sheaves to lay at His feet! Spiritual sons and daughters to enjoy throughout the ages of eternity! Dare I sell out those things for a mess of pottage?

What, you cannot control these desires? You wish you could, but you know you'd fail? Temptation comes often but the apostle Paul said, "I die daily." How much do you love Him? Enough to surrender these desires to Him every time they come? Enough to let Him do the enabling? That, you remember, is the key to the overcoming of every failure that hinders us in bearing the kind of fruit that He demands - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, and temperance. You cannot live this yourself, but He is waiting and longing to be given the opportunity of living all this beautiful life through you - are you willing that He should?

— J.H. Darby
The Harvester