

Temperance

By Aaron Lapp

Temperance is about balance. We balance our checkbook. We balance our time between work, rest, eating, and sleeping. We balance our work with extracurricular activities. In fact, we could say the eleventh commandment is, “Thou shalt have balance.”

Balance must have selectivity. If we would do all the extracurricular activities of playing games, hunting, reading, scrapbooking, photography, or other hobbies, our lives would have an imbalance. We must choose what fits into the plan for our lives. This requires some thought. And since our lives aren’t our own—we belong to God—we always need to ask God for direction.

Married people have additional areas to balance. A married person is under a covenant with a special spouse who needs to be considered. The age, stage, and needs of one’s children should be a factor in deciding what and how many extracurricular activities or hobbies to allow in one’s life.

Hobbies can become very time-consuming, besides being a drain on finances. Husband and wife should talk about their interests and decide together how involved either of them should be in those things. Some wishes in this category may need to be left until later in life for the sake of finances and the children, or because of time restraints.

That said, hobbies can be an entry in the family budget. Adhering to a budget will make hobbies workable. Allow

some revenue for them but stop spending on them when that allocation is used up. Hobbies should be the easiest item to control on your budget since it’s not a necessity like food, medical bills, or school tuition. Hobbies should be a small percentage of the budget. Remember, our subject is temperance, which means balance in all things.

Why should we be temperate? Intemperance scatters, temperance gathers. Intemperance causes frustration and complaining, temperance yields wholeness and thankfulness. Intemperance causes restlessness and produces friction, whereas temperance results in contentment and produces clarity of thought. Intemperance causes subtraction and division, but temperance gives occasion to addition and multiplication in our lives. The seed that is sown always results in a sure harvest. Pick out those difficult areas in your life where you will begin to use some principles from this discussion for your own life. A lack of being temperate in seemingly non-financial areas could be draining away some of your money in an indirect way.

Temperance has to do largely with personal discipline. Personal discipline always adds value to one’s life.

A Fruit of the Spirit

Temperance is a fruit of the Spirit. When we are born again by the Spirit of God, we begin to bear Spirit fruit. There are many exciting promises in the Bible about God giving

us the power to do the things we should. There will be some conflict against our selfish and sin-inclined flesh, to be sure. Galatians 5:17 says, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are *contrary* the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (emphasis added). Our emotions will at times rebel and scream at us, but our resolve to do God’s will needs to hold firm. Don’t abandon ship during those storms; the calm will be worth waiting on God.

Being pruned. The prickly weed said to the contented grapevine, “Oh grapevine, how do you make such lovely grapes?” The grapevine replied, “I don’t *make* them, I just bear them.” Getting the grapevine to bear fruit isn’t just adding more fertilizer; we also prune the grapevine. Ouch! And mind you, that pruning is done a while *before* the grapes even begin to appear. Pruning now, fruit later. That’s one of the tough lessons on fruit bearing. Let the needed pruning be done early in your life. However, it’s never too late to benefit from additional pruning later in your life.

Avoiding extremes. Our subject is temperance, so right here we must caution against going to extremes in pruning. For instance, Dad shouldn’t force his wife and children to cut back on meat (the highest priced grocery item) and then eat cheeseburgers while on the road. Any frugality measures should *first* be done by Dad, since the Bible says that he is the “savior” of his wife and children.¹

We are also concerned with pruning the family financial tree so hard that things like the children’s needs for corrective eyeglasses or dental work are passed up. Some things must be done at critical stages of children’s growth. Later may be too late or involve more expenses.

Another extreme would be over compulsion to save money to where it becomes addictive and causes the family to suffer physically, emotionally, or both.

The other extreme would be *impulsive* habits of

spending money, irrespective of a plan to make it reach until the next paycheck. Or worse yet, where Dad or Mom use a credit card to buy whatever, before the money is in the checking account. This violates temperance in all things and the principle of good and responsible stewardship.

Being disciplined. Temperance is synonymous with discipline in Titus 2:11-12: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live *soberly*, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (emphasis added).

The word *soberly* is related to temperance and means being disciplined, self-controlled, moderate in opinion or passion, discreet, and temperate (Strong’s Concordance 4993–4998). The athletes for the Greek championship games knew these terms in practice sessions and in actual competition. The real world in which we live isn’t a party for a casual practice session; it’s a real life to be lived with the goal of working towards being above average in spiritual fitness.

Paul drew from that idea when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:25–27, “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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I *keep under* my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (Emphasis added). Keeping your body under control from carnal lusts and pursuits is one side of the coin. The other side is bringing the appetites of the body and desires of the mind into subjection to the obedience of Christ and His Word. Those who do both of those aspects will be amply rewarded in time and in eternity.

Having Jesus in your heart by faith is an internal experience of rest; being subject to His Word is an external means of measurement. Having both the internal desires regulated by spiritual nurture and the outer activity in Biblical discipline is the goal. Both are supremely needed

When life becomes more and more complex, it’s usually an indication that something is amiss in our choices.

¹ Ephesians 5:23, 28 “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”

as a Christian who is temperate and disciplined. Think seriously about how you can do this in your life. Often times it will save money, rather than cost money.

Power Under Reasonable Control

Temperance is power under reasonable control. In dress, that results in modesty. In money matters, that means being frugal.² Temperance is when physical, mental, and material appetites don't control our choices, but we control them.

It would be a double wrong to grant an elastic conscience in judging ourselves, but have an iron clad conscience in judging others. The juice from sour grapes (being critical of others) makes a sour drink. Kings, princes, and noblemen have fallen in their own slime pits when they had the mastery over the masses of humanity but not in their own personal lives. They self-destructed in their own excesses of food, drink, dress, entertainment, and immorality. Their lifestyle was chosen as one grand package for themselves, and resulted in being intemperate.

Power under control is illustrated by mighty rivers that direct huge amounts of water through giant turbines to produce electricity. Or a fire burning within the controls of a furnace to heat a house. It would only take the strike of a match in the wrong place to cause that fire to burn up the whole house and destroy it.

Self-control is powerful because it regulates time, energy, and money. It maintains a margin of these resources for unexpected needs or interests. Sometimes our schedules are simply too full, too hurried, too self-oppressive, and too exasperating. Sometimes our finances are strapped too tight, and the stress of debt is overwhelming. In those times we might become too weak to be fully yielded to Jesus and His way, besides being unhandy to live with.

Sir Joshua Reynolds had this one-liner: "Simplicity is an exact medium between too little and too much." Simplicity is the art of being satisfied with a little less rather than always wanting a little more. Clutter is the curse of being driven to accumulate and pile up unnecessary items, whereby it becomes a witness against simplicity, contentment, and temperance. Foresight

is better for us than hindsight when it is used to avoid needless debt, or habits of consumption that cause the pit of bondage of some sort.

The Rightful Use of Lawful Things

Temperance is the rightful use of lawful things. Some things may be right in themselves but can be used in a wrong way. On the other hand, there's no right way to do a wrong thing. Sin will take us from the simple to the complex, whereas righteousness will take us from the complex to the simple. When life becomes more and more complex, it's usually an indication that something is amiss in our choices. We can do many small things to make life simpler. We should pursue that more, rather than less. Counseling is needed for people who somehow get into complex situations. We can counsel ourselves to the disciplines of making life simpler, beginning with the area that causes the most stress.

The Root of Temperance

Temperance comes from the root word *temper*. Things such as glass and steel become more useful if they are tempered. Tempered windowpanes are stronger than untempered ones. The same is true of steel. Steel is heated to very hot temperatures, depending on its use. Forks, shovels, and mechanics' wrenches all need to be tempered in the fire. So must the spring of a watch or the springs in a large semitruck or the scoop on an excavator.

The cooling off period (called annealment) is critical to the strength and versatility of the end product. Varying uses will require their own time and way of cooling down. Small glass articles can be cooled down in thirty minutes, which is relatively fast. The large telescope at the Palomar Observatory in California has a 200-inch mirror that required a cooling process of almost one year.

Being tempered together has a two-part application: (1) Any crisis in marriage, business, finances, personal health, or relationships is like being tested in the fire. (2) The critical part in being tempered together in our marriage or other relationships is how the cooling process is approached. Tempered glass or steel must cool down to become tempered. The same is true in human relationships. We can't go on forever in the heat of crisis. Nor dare we skip the critical annealment process. Otherwise, we lose our value and usefulness. Without being tempered, we are only

² Frugal, *Webster's New World Dictionary*: not wasteful; thrifty; not costly or luxurious; economical

a mass of steel that cannot be bent. Without cooling down, we cannot be shaped to usefulness.

By accepting the oven of crisis and then moving on to forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration (annealing and a new oneness), we become better people. This renewal helps us relate better with our children, which should be a primary focus for most of our lives, and with others in our world. Cooling down to a more temperate contentment and modesty means our mental thermostat is in a moderate zone. This makes us more approachable, better listeners, and more reasonable in our expectations of others.

Sow the precious seed; tend it well. A good harvest will bless your life until the sun goes down. For some of you that could easily be another 50 years or more.

Temperance Is Contentment, Not Equality

Temperance is related to contentment. The desire to be equal can be a selfish cloak to be the greatest and the best—at the peak of the pyramid.

We can apply this cover-up of wanting to be number one in our social and church lives. Being equal to our friends is really about the struggle to eventually be number one. Satan tried it with God and was cast out of Heaven. Adonijah tried it with Solomon and was slain (see 1 Kings 1:13–2:25). The Bible in numerous places teaches us to humble ourselves, deny ourselves, take the lowest spot, and condescend to men of low estate. Just let others go ahead and be number one. That isn't natural, but it's Biblical.

We naturally want to be upscale, sought after, and be on the top of the ladder. Even if we have the money to do so, the Bible teaches against it. The really sad part is when families try to be on top of the social pyramid, but can't afford to spend the money they think is required to get there. That violates the Biblical command to "be content with such things as ye have."³ Besides, it robs them from having a restful and thankful spirit. Thankfulness helps us

³ Hebrews 13:5 "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

focus on what God has given us; envy forces us to focus on what others have, or in some cases, only seem to have.

It's up to us to be temperate in our desires, plans, and schedules. That's why taking some time to write out a philosophy of your life can be good. All of us have that philosophy already in our minds, even if just in piecemeal fashion, but writing it down can help immensely in looking at your priorities in a more real way. It will be scary to do so, but I urge you to take the time for it. It will take some time now, but it could save lots of time later. Sometimes we have to spend money to save money, we say. Why not do the same with our time?

We use time to work, eat, and sleep. We use time to go to church and to visit with family and friends. We should occasionally use a little of our time to evaluate where we could make better use of our time. For some of us, our lives could be improved by starting our household work earlier, by mowing the lawn or weeding the garden or doing needed repairs early in the day or week. We cannot borrow time as some borrow money or save time as some save money for later use. Time is now and now is time. Temperance can help us make good use of the time God is giving us as a daily gift measured in seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, and years.

To make better use of our time, supposedly, we use electricity or increase horsepower in hand-held power tools, as well as in agriculture and industrial equipment and in almost every application to facilitate our work. We have instant foods, instant world-wide communication, instant photography, instant calculators, instant computers, and we can "google" instant information. The time we "save" is used for what purposes? That question should be allowed to persist, if we want to scale down our hurried lives a notch or two and move toward more temperance in our lives.

God invites us to pray for wisdom, which has the idea of making good use of the knowledge we have. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not (does not scold us); and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). Knowledge is having the facts; wisdom is the art of wise choices based on that knowledge. May God give us wisdom to be temperate.

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