

Developing Temperance

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After Saul knew that God would give the kingdom to David, his wrath and jealousy were kindled toward David to such an extent that he dealt treacherously with David over a long time and tried to kill him at every opportunity. He would take Israel's army in constant pursuit of the fulfillment of his maddening lust for David's blood, even if it left the nation defenseless.

Put yourself in David's position. How might you feel toward a man who was trying in every possible way to kill you?

Late one night, while Saul and all his army were sleeping, David came out of his hiding place, descended to Israel's camp, and walked up to the sleeping Saul. David was encouraged to take this golden opportunity to kill Saul. In fact, it was even put into spiritual terms, "God has delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day" (I Samuel 26:8).

How does David react?

This is an exercise of the fruit of the Spirit called "temperance". David was conscious of God's presence and of God's will. He gave more value to God's will than to his own desires and feelings.

For David God was very near, David's reason for not killing Saul was because Saul was God's anointed. David tempered his own desires by doing what God desired.

(A parenthetical thought: if David had killed Saul that night and not spared his life, could he have said, "The LORD is the strength of my life," and "in this I will be confident though an host should encamp against me." Could he have written, "For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in his pavilion." Who would have believed him when he said, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.")

David was very conscious of doing God's will. He controlled his own natural desires to kill one who was trying to kill him.

This doing of God's will is temperance. It is the conscious giving over of the various aspects of our life to God's control. It is living in obedience to Him.

What areas of your life are you unable to control (or to let God control)?

Is temperance ever needed!

Most men govern their lives by their desires and emotions. Frequently people give as the reason why they did or did not do something: "I feel like it" or "I don't want to" or something similar. Free reign is given to most desires. If it feels good, do it. If you feel strongly that you must do something or if you have peace about it, it is believed that that is sufficient reason. Even obedience of God's law is often determined by whether we feel like it or not. The impression given is that desires and emotions are sinless.

A tight reign must be held on our emotions and desires. This is self-control. It is a disciplining of oneself to conform more and more to the performance of God's will.

By virtue of his creation man is a servant of God. By this act God set out what was best and good for man. Within the sphere of his being a willing servant of God, man realized his full potential, and experienced the great joy which always accompanied his obedience.

But the devil deceived man into thinking that this position of being God's friend-servant is slavery of the worst sort, a slavery which deprives man of personal rights and liberties. Becoming a rebel against this service to God, man believed that he had the right to decide for himself what is right and what is wrong, and the right to live as he pleased. This, man thought and thinks, is freedom. The delusion continues, for whereas his "freedom" brings only misery,

natural man is convinced that misery results from others depriving him of his rights.

The Lord Jesus Christ removed these blinding scales of unbelief from the eyes of some natural men. He enables those to whom He gives sight to see that to be enslaved to God and to Christ is real freedom. The truth shall make you free. It is in doing God's will that man reaches the potential of his created and redeemed abilities and experiences real joy. The doing of God's will is freedom from the slavery of sin.

The child of God CAN develop self-control. He MUST develop it!

He can, because God's power is working in him, not only in regeneration, but constantly by His indwelling Spirit. This divine power is so real that the child of God is described as being a partaker of the divine nature. This power gives all things that pertain to spiritual life and godliness (II Peter 1:3, 4). The believer can develop self-control, "for sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14).

He must develop it. Exactly because God's "divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness", we are told, "giving 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" (II Peter 1:5-7).

We already have faith by virtue of our being called of God. This faith is not to remain barren and unfruitful. As God works in us, it is certain that we, through the power of the Spirit, can and must work, although in weakness.

Not only must the virtue of temperance (along with the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit) be developed, but also it must be developed with all diligence, i.e., with haste. Diligence because time is swiftly passing. Diligence because the treasure of God's divine power is precious. Wasted opportunities to develop temperance must be avoided like one would avoid a plague. Diligence and earnestness make faith fruitful. Without diligence, faith, though genuine, will bear few and shriveled fruit.

How can temperance be developed? II Peter 1:6 indicates that self-control is built on knowledge.

First, all the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit are characteristics of God. As we get to know God better, we will be able to be more like Him - and so take on these characteristics.

Also, the knowledge of God's work in Christ for us, the knowledge of His working in us by His Spirit, and the knowledge of His will for us as described in His Word, give the power to keep all desires and emotions under control. We can because we know that Christ delivered us from the dominion of sin. We can because we know that God created us in Christ Jesus unto good works. We know how we can because the Bible teaches us to depend prayerfully on God. We ask God to increase our spiritual sensitivity as we read His Word. We ask Him to grant the grace of humility to obey, even when we do not want to or feel like it, because we recognize God's sovereign right and His wisdom in demanding of us what He does demand. We ask Him to make His loving presence so real that we delight to do His will.

This is not a legalistic abstinence. Prohibitionists outlawed liquor, many mistakenly thinking that this was self-control. The celibacy of Rome's priests is also a legalistic abstinence and not the exercise of the godly, spiritual virtue of temperance.

Temperance is power over oneself, self-control, whereby one masters his desires and emotions through the knowledge of the Word and of God's will. It is being in subjection to God. Temperance is concentrating on doing God's will, and not letting earthly considerations interfere with this Divinely required obedience. The knowledge of what God has done for Him brings this

self-control.

Temperance comes through the knowledge of Christ's self-control on the cross, when not nails but His love for God and for His people held Him on the cross. The knowledge that God is still working in us by His Spirit and for us in all things motivates the genuine believer to the realization that he must and can control himself.

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