

VIRTUE 7

TEMPERANCE

Everything is permissible—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

—1 Corinthians 10:23-24

Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

—Proverbs 23:20-21

Temperance can be defined as “moderation in action, thought, or feeling; restraint.”²² To a knight, this means complete abstinence from some things and moderation in all things. Without this virtue, a knight’s life and character will fail.

When people talk about moderation, one topic surfaces more than others—drinking alcohol. In this area, I have made a lifetime choice to abstain from alcohol. To others, occasional social drinking may be their version of moderation. Yet to others, different rules of conscience may apply. Without getting into the divisive discussion on which position is most valid, suffice it to say that all positions should include moderation. As the apostle Paul said, “Everything

is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12). He also admonished that we should be more focused on being filled with the Holy Spirit than drinking in excess: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

Whatever one’s choice on the issue of drinking, a knight’s strength and time is not for drunkenness or wastefulness, but for serving others:

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves (Romans 15:1).

Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time—for strength and not for drunkenness (Ecclesiastes 10:17).

Temperance can also apply to things like television or social media. Allowing yourself to become obsessed with television or other drains of life and time will sap you of strength that could be used elsewhere productively. However, remember that temperance allows for reprieve and rest. Remember, because the Lord paid for your life, He owns your time too.

It is sad, but the future of many young people is being exchanged for temporary joys and pleasures like excessive video games, television, online social media, and other similar activities. Recent studies reveal that teens spend an average of sixteen hours per week online.²³ Add to this time the average time spent watching TV (another fourteen hours) and talking on the phone (another eight hours),²⁴ and you nearly have the same amount of time spent on a full-time job every week. Are these things bad? Are they a complete waste of time? Certainly not. But all things should be enjoyed in moderation: “Everything is permissible—but not everything is beneficial.

Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive” (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Finally, a word of caution in the area of temperance: Be on your guard against legalism. While some personalities may be more drawn toward legalistic attitudes than others, it is certainly not an attitude endorsed by New Testament teachings (especially those from Christ Himself). Be careful not to turn others away from Christianity by judging the attitudes and behaviors of others—allow the Holy Spirit to do that work. However, if your Christian brother is caught in sin, it is your job to correct him (Galatians 6:1). Just be careful how you do it. Sometimes we can make a stronger statement by our actions rather than our words. For example, I had a good friend in high school who would excuse himself for a walk outside when the group took up smoking. His actions were not judgmental, but they were not supportive either.

REFLECT

I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

—Philippians 4:10-13

RESPOND

1. How can one live along the fine line between excess, or indulgence, and legalism?

2. What may be acceptable for you as a Christian may not be acceptable to another. In these gray areas (where Scripture does not call the behavior a clear sin), how can you live with grace and be accepting of others?
3. Is it ever our job to suggest temperance in the life of another believer? Of a non-Christian?
4. In what areas of your life do you need to apply temperance?
5. How can applying the trait of temperance make our lives more enjoyable?

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