

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

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Unbridled Passions**

Temperance John Daniels

The second epistle of Peter is certainly a poignant letter. Written with an awareness that his death was imminent (2 Peter 1:14). Written with a warning that false teachers would seek to lead them astray (2 Peter 2:1-2). Written with a hope that they would be mindful of the commandments given to them by the apostles of Jesus Christ (2 Peter. 3:1-2). The final command this aged apostle leaves his readers is a charge to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (cf. 2 Peter 3:18).

Thankfully we are not left to wonder what Peter had in mind, for in 2 Peter 1:5-8 we learn what it means to grow in the knowledge of Jesus. It is the development of eight graces. In these, according to verse 8, we must abound. Only then can it be said that we are “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

This growth process involves more than simply increasing our “intellectual” knowledge of Jesus. Peter here is talking about growing in a fuller and personal knowledge of our Savior which comes by developing the “Christ-like” attributes

listed in this passage. The more we grow in these “graces”, the more we really “know” Jesus.

Of these eight, “Temperance” (i.e., self-control; self-discipline) plays an important part. After all, “What good is it to grow in knowledge of good and evil if we do not have the ability to make proper use of such knowledge?” So, what exactly is “temperance”, and how do we add it to our lives? The Greek word is enkrateia from the word kratos, meaning “strength” as defined by various scholars: “one holding himself in” (Robertson); “the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites” (Thayer); “where this virtue subsists (abides), temptation can have little influence” (McKnight). As found in the New Testament, (i.e., Acts 24:25), “the word follows ‘righteousness’, which represents God’s claims, self-control being man’s response thereto” (Vine). Paul, in Galatians 5:23, explains that it is an element of that fruit born by one who is walking by the Spirit. Also explained by Paul, it is a requirement of one who would serve as an elder (Titus 1:8). “TEMPERANCE” is

therefore the discipline of one’s self so as to live in harmony with the knowledge of right and wrong that one has. The importance of which is seen as we consider the demand that is placed upon the one who desired to be a disciple of The Christ.

A requirement of The Christ in Luke 9:23 is that one must exercise denial of self as a necessity to follow Him. Therefore, “TEMPERANCE” is an important element of what God’s grace teaches us (Titus 2:11-12). One cannot be a follower (disciple) of Christ without exercising “TEMPERANCE.” Paul realized the need to keep his body under control in 1 Corinthians 9:27 and Peter’s condemnation of false teachers included their becoming enslaved again (due to a lack of “TEMPERANCE”) to the corruption that is in the world (2 Peter 2:19-20).

But, the problem with developing this grace is seen throughout scripture. It is easier to take (capture) a city than to control the spirit (Proverbs 16:32). The tongue is just one example of how hard self-control can be (James 1:26; 3:2-10).

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Editorial
Unbridled Passion
Ronnie Hayes

Unbridled passion, unrestrained or ungoverned lust, these desires can be good or bad. *Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says that lust “denotes strong desire of any kind” (25). If they are good and proper then they can govern our hearts. When they are evil and bad it is our responsibility to control or repress such thoughts.

Paul warned the saints at Rome of this very problem (cf. Romans 1:18-32). Yet, when man reaches the point of uncontrolled lust, he usually elevates himself above God. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22). Despite the warnings of God, when man lives a life which is out of control, he will seek to justify what he is doing. At Rome, they changed the glory of God: “And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:23). They also changed the truth into a lie: “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever” (Romans 1:25). I guess it is still true today, some people just can’t be warned. Solomon warned, “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Proverbs 16:32). “He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich” (Proverbs 21:17). “Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it” (Proverbs 25:16). Paul warned us, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your

members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:12,13). We would be wise to listen to the warnings concerning passions or lust. Are we in control or are we being controlled by our lusts?

Peter reminds us that we are in a war against the flesh and the lusts thereof. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Paul also spoke of this war. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). This is a battle for the control of our lives. “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Romans 7:5-9). In this war we have a responsibility to do our very best. “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18). “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). We cannot afford to allow something to distract us from this battle. “No man that warreth

entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4).

We have a weapon with which to battle the forces of evil. “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:13-18). There is really no way to face the battles of life without the word of God. How would one determine right and wrong without the Bible? Which directions should we take? What life should we live? It is the word that illuminates our way (cf. Psalm 119:105) and directs our foot steps (cf. John 5:39).

This is a war that we cannot afford to lose. Paul told the Church at Rome that those who lived lives of unbridled passions are “...worthy of death” (Romans 1:32). Those who find themselves separated from God will face an eternal death. “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers” (Revelation 21:8). It is a battle for our soul. Who is in control of our lives? Are we governed by God or Satan? The choice is ours!

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Pleasure

Ashley Kizer

Lysias once wrote, “Remember that desire is an integral part of all human nature.”¹ The philosopher Thomas Hobbes believed that every action of man is influenced by his own selfish desires. He is quoted as saying, “Man is distinguished, not only by his reason, but by this singular passion from other animals, which is a lust of the mind, that by a perseverance of delight in the continued and indefatigable generation of knowledge, exceeds the short vehemence of any carnal pleasure.”² It is true that we all have wants and needs for ourselves, but these wishes differ from person to person. “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure.” What is it that makes a man enjoy hours of in-depth Bible study when another would rather spend his time with a pornographic magazine? What difference does pleasure make in our lives? Should we make decisions based on pleasure?

It is conceivable that our actions should be governed by pleasure, for even God Himself seeks to be pleased. His creation was made for this very purpose: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). If it were a sin to be motivated by pleasure, then the Bible would not promise a reward to those who do the will of the “Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Jesus mentioned mansions that were being prepared for His followers (John 14:2-3). Inspiration allowed John the Revelator to see a destination completely void of sadness or pain, decked with the likeness of jewels and gold (Revelation 21). Is it then wrong for us to yearn for that state of pleasure that was promised to us?

Considering these proofs, it is most reasonable to deduce that

pleasure is not inherently good or evil. It must be understood, however, that there are specific kinds of pleasure that do fall into these categories, based on the standard of God’s inspired and infallible Word. For the sake of this study, let us consider there to be two general types of pleasure: sensual and sensible. We will define sensual pleasure as that which is pleasing to the physical senses. Sensible pleasure, however, will be contrasted by its appeal to one’s intellect, judgment, and ultimately the Creator. Please note that some activities may be both physically and intellectually pleasing.

Moses noticed a stark contrast between two types of pleasure. The Hebrews writer reveals that he chose, “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25). The text goes on to inform us that Moses’ motivation was due to the fact that he could see “him who is invisible” (v. 27). As we read the account of Moses’ life in the Old Testament, we notice that he consistently made choices based on this sensible pleasure. It pleased him to do what pleased God because he could “see” the outcome.

God does not deny that there is pleasure in sin. Of those who “received not the love of truth,” Paul said they “had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:12). Our lust can draw us away from God because it entices us (cf. James 1:14). Certainly, we will not be enticed by something that is uncomfortable. However, we must be aware of the consequences of sensual pleasure. “Sin for a season” can become timeless torment if it is not washed away by the blood of the Savior.

There are some who would devote their whole existences to the pursuit of sensual pleasure. These

“hedonists” (taken from the Greek word for pleasure, *hēdonē*)³ base their philosophy on the supposed axiom, “whatever causes pleasure is right.”⁴ Ironically, they find that their short-lived pleasure leads to ruin. At one time, King Solomon sought to find meaning in this type of pleasure, but he concluded, “this also is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 2:1). In Proverbs 21:17 he wrote, “He that loveth pleasure *shall be* a poor man,” further delineating the truth about hedonism. Of rich men, James said, “weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon *you*” (James 5:1). Though they had “lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton,” James said, “ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter” (v. 5).

Not only is sensible pleasure satisfying, it will last for an eternity. At the conclusion of Solomon’s search for satisfaction, he found that only fearing God and keeping his commandments would make him whole (Ecclesiastes 12:13). God, through Isaiah, prophesied to those of His people who would repent from seeking their own pleasures and speaking their own words, “Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth...” (Isaiah 58:14).

A faithful Christian’s pleasure will not always feel good, but it will have a good result. Paul wrote, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). This is a reflection of the pleasure our heavenly Father must have felt when He decided to “bruise” His only Son and “put *him* to grief” in order to make his soul an offering for sin.

¹ Kabric, Robert. *Greek People*. 2nd. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1997.

² Thomas Hobbes. “*Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*.” 2006. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.. 30 Jun 2006

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes#Quotations>.

³ Vine, W.E.. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997.

⁴ “Hedonism.” *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*. 2006. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.. 30 Jun 2006

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hedonism>>.

Protection Of A More Important Type Kerry Richardson

Watch a prime-time television program, listen to radio programming for 30 minutes, drive 50 miles on a stretch of highway, surf the internet, or view a PG-13 movie... the chances are great that you will see/hear something related to sexual activity. Many can remember the days when such things were taboo in our society... to merely suggest the idea of sexual activity in public was “off-limits” and subjected one’s self to criticism. Today, however, our culture has changed dramatically.

As a nation, there has been an obvious decline in recent years in regards to morality. And, unless something changes in the next ten years, we will likely be heralding exact same messages... messages like “the people of our nation have never faced morality issues of this magnitude.” Unfortunately, as with all cases of tarnished morality in our society, the body of Christ has suffered tremendously because of the growing number of sexual temptations. With the changing fashions in clothing (*philosophy seems to be “show as much skin/curves as possible”*), the instant availability of pornography (*via internet, television, etc.*), and the constant barrage of temptation in entertainment media, hundreds of Christians have traded their soul salvation, family, and church support for a “seasonal pleasure” (Hebrews 11:25). And, sadly, this trend will likely continue unless we take serious preventative measures to combat Satan and his forces.

Today, as I ponder the plague of increased sexual temptation, I think about sunscreen. Why sunscreen? Simply because there are various levels of “protection” that are offered. If you want minimum protection (*allow some sun to reach your skin*), you can select one of the lower SPF numbers (*15 or 20*). However, if a person seeks maximum protection, he/she can select a much stronger

sunscreen with a high SPF (*30 or 45*). When the topic of sexual temptation/activity is discussed, it is interesting that Christians choose various levels of “protection.” Some Christians, who are mildly concerned about temptations of a sexual nature, make a choice to view PG movies only... but condone the wearing of inappropriate clothing under the guise of being “fashionable.” Other Christians who are more concerned about protection from sexual temptation might choose to forsake a high school dance... but will openly watch inappropriate programming on MTV (*actually I’m doubtful that MTV has any appropriate programming*). In the midst of these Christians, however, there is the child of God who selects the highest level of “protection.” Living under the admonition of passages such as Philippians 4:8 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, all sexual temptation is avoided at all costs... to the point that there is “zero toleration.” If television programming contains inappropriate sexual content, it is turned off... if all of the latest clothing fashions are sexually inappropriate, they are left on the store rack... if activities with people of the opposite gender are fraught with sexual temptation, other forms of activity are pursued. I advise each child of God to seek the highest “protection”... and never settle for “minimum protection.” As you read this, however, you may wonder how it is possible to achieve that “maximum protection”... what can a Christian do that will effectively ward off sexual temptation?

First, each child of God must acknowledge the *possibility of sexual temptation*. As a youth minister, I witnessed many amazing things in young people. Possibly the greatest was a 15-year old male who once boldly stated that sexual temptation was never among the temptations that he faced. Some church leaders, possessing a similar attitude, have

found themselves in compromising situations in counseling/visitation settings and given in to sexual sin. If David, a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), succumbed to sins of a sexual nature, we should also acknowledge the possibility in our lives.

In realizing the possibility of sexual temptation, we should also strive to *protect ourselves to the best of our ability*. Whether it is using the “zero tolerance” on television shows, using good sense in a workplace setting (*i.e. never be alone with a co-worker*), choosing appropriate places to take a date, or making sound choices regarding internet usage, we should seek to keep sexual temptation at a distance... a great distance. When the apostle Paul told the Corinthian brethren to “flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18), he intended them to “stay away” from sexual sin at all costs.

Third, if sexual temptation is a difficulty, seek encouragement from brethren who are equipped to assist you. Whether it is a godly preacher, elder, wife, or friend, seek their prayers and help as you struggle in this spiritual battle. James 5:16 says “confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed; the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Notice a two-fold implication in James’ words: (1) confession of sins to a fellow brother or sister provides encouragement (*possibly through accountability*) and (2) additional prayers of our brethren lead to spiritual health for the child of God who has sinned.

Today, do you use the maximum SPF as it pertains to sexual temptation? If not, let me encourage you to begin today... and live a sexually pure life in God’s sight!

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Entertainment Dale Hubbert

Passion is defined by Thorndike/Barnhart dictionary as "having very strong feelings". When very strong feelings are unbridled the consequences can be severe in a way that distances mankind from God and sends society into a cesspool of moral depravity. Passion is good when directed in the proper area and harmful when God is omitted from passion's desires.

Is anything wrong with entertainment? No! Good and wholesome entertainment can provide a rest from weariness and uplift the heart. Solomon informed that a merry heart does good like a medicine (Proverbs 17:22). This same inspired writer also stated: "I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 2:1). The nature and quantity of entertainment will ultimately determine the value or the damage entertainment provides.

The society we are a part of is addicted to entertainment. Television, radio, Internet, athletics, and other forms of entertainment present themselves to us every day. Billions of dollars are spent to recruit us to various avenues of entertainment. The devil has found this venue to be one of his most successful tools. Pleasure in its proper perspective is vastly different from the scene described in I Timothy 5:6: "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

The book of Philippians speaks of God working in us to do of His good pleasure (2:13). The letter to the Thessalonians warns that all will be damned who believe not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2:12). The choice and amount of pleasure determine the redeeming or dooming effects.

It is easy to see things are out of control when those receiving the highest pay in our country are athletes and entertainers. I enjoy sports but is there anyone worth millions of dollars a year to play a child's game? Doctors, teachers, firemen, policemen, and others make many valuable contributions to our lives but their compensation pales in comparison to many who do nothing but entertain us.

How can we be so sure that entertainment has swirled out of control? It will cost a family of four more to attend a professional sporting event than many families will contribute to the work of the church that Sunday. Sports stadiums sell out of season's tickets and have waiting lists while church buildings continue to have more and more empty seats. Families will find little if any time to attend the assembly of the saints and do the work of the church. We then seem to be surprised when these children leave home without a strong relationship with Christ and His church.

The devil is the coordinator of much entertainment. How many television programs can you recommend that would be profitable for a Christian to watch? How many movies would you feel comfortable watching with Jesus? How many forms of pleasure do you know that are controlled and overseen by Christians whose greatest concern is the instruction of God to keep our minds and lives pure and holy (Matthew 5:8)?

We can be deceived into allowing things that would be all right in moderation to become excessive at the exclusion of other things that need to be in our life. Did I spend more time last week watching television or reading the scriptures? Will I drive further to watch a ballgame than to

attend a gospel meeting? Will I sit through a two-hour movie but complain if the preacher goes a little longer than usual?

Pleasure and entertainment can become addictive. Filthy language, sinful activity, immodest dress, and sexual perversion have become prevalent in movies and television. It is so commonplace that we rarely blink or blush anymore (Jeremiah 6:15). Christians can unknowingly become insensitive to sin and be deceived into thinking that we are not affected by our consumption of this garbage.

The entertainment field has been a colossal contributor to the downfall of the home in America. God's plan for the home is often degraded by television and movies while the sinful practice of homosexuality is glorified and presented as a normal and acceptable segment of life. God is mocked and dishonored while the motto "if it feels good do it" is promoted and enhanced.

There are some questions worthy of asking in regard to entertainment. Who is providing the entertainment? What is their purpose? Will my participation or observation strengthen me? Will my participation or observation weaken me? Would Jesus approve and participate?

We certainly live in an age of unbridled passion. Entertainment offers a seductive outlet for that passion. As God's children we need to have an appreciation of pleasure with a continued prayerful effort to be cautious as to the kind and amount of entertainment we choose. May God be praised and considered in all that we do.

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The Tongue Ben Wright

There is much talk in the world today of weapons of mass destruction. Nations are spending untold millions of dollars to develop weapons that destroy in better and faster ways than the weapons of their enemies.

What nation would not give such vast sums of money for a small weapon that had the power of a sword (Psalm 64:3); the swiftness and accuracy of an arrow (Jeremiah 9:8; the effectiveness of fire (James 3:5-6); and the potency of a deadly poison (James 3:8)? A small weapon so powerful as to have the power of death and life (Proverbs 18:21)? Surely, every nation on the face of the earth would pour out their national treasures for a weapon of such potential devastation.

Sadly, this weapon has been fully developed for thousands of years and is still in frequent use. You and I know this weapon to be the tongue. James, by inspirations, wrote

“Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell...But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:4-6, 8).

The tongue is the most terrible weapon known to man. It has the power to kill: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (Proverbs 18:21). A tongue used for evil is one of the things that God hates

(Proverbs 6:17). The improper use of the tongue has brought down nations: “For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen; because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory” (Isaiah 3:8). Sins of the tongue are listed in the charges brought against the Gentiles by God (Romans 1:29-32). Eventually, improper use of the tongue can, and will, condemn someone for eternity (Revelation 21:8).

What makes the tongue such a tremendous weapon is that it can be used in so many different ways. It can lie, blaspheme, spread rumors, make false charges, boast, malign, slander as well as other sins. This weapon can be, and is, used in a multitude of ways and for a variety of purposes.

How can we control this fierce weapon to which nearly everyone has access? The only way one can control the tongue is to control the mind that oversees the tongue. Jesus said, “But those things that proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man...” (Matthew 15:18-20a).

Christians are to be those who have control of the mind. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2). According to Strong’s, “renewing” means, “complete change for the better.” One’s mind is renewed by the Holy Spirit: Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). This

renewing of the Holy Spirit is brought about by a study of the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

God has given us examples of the devastation the tongue can cause (Isaiah 3:8), commands against committing sins of tongue (James 3), and warnings about the ultimate destination of those guilty of unforgiven sins of the tongue (Revelation 21:8). God’s word is our only defense against the sins of the tongue. It is the only weapon we have been given to battle against the tongue. It is the only tool we have to tame the tongue.

This tongue can be used for good when tamed. James tells us that we can bless God with this tongue (James 3:9). One whose tongue is under control will dwell in the tabernacle of the Lord (Psalm 15:1-3). It can bring health (Proverbs 12:18). Solomon wrote: “Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles” (Proverbs 21:23). It is the tongue that is to be used in the proclamation and defense of the gospel. No greater use of the tongue can be found than that.

The tongue may cause more people to lose their souls than any other tactic of Satan. Many a Christian has ruined his reputation by a loose tongue. As someone has wisely said, God gave us two ears and one mouth. We should listen twice as much as we talk. We should pray the prayer of the Psalmist daily: “Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue” (Psalm 120:2). And we should probably add in our prayer, “Especially from my own.”

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Riches Church Webster

Few things accomplish as much good as money. Governments use it to fund social programs, build highways, and promote commerce. Scientists lobby for it to fund their research for the cure of fatal diseases. Churches need it to feed the poor and evangelize the lost.

It seems odd, then, that something so essential could cause so much conflict. Politicians are corrupted by it. Athletes refuse to play until they get more of it. And, sadly, homes are destroyed by too much of it, too little of it, or the love of it. In one magazine poll, couples surveyed said the number-one thing they fight about is money [Robert Sullivan, *An Intimate Portrait: Americans and Their Money, Worth* (June 1994), 60]. “Till *debt* do us part” is, in many marriages, closer to reality than the vows the partners said at the altar.

Money and one’s pursuit of it are problems God’s people face in every era. What biblical principles help us have the proper attitude toward riches?

Everything is God’s. We will never view material things properly until we grasp the biblical concept of stewardship, a concept which consists of two components. The first is, simply put, *God owns everything*. We speak of *our* money, *our* cars, and *our* clothes, but these things are not actually ours . . . they are God’s. God spoke through the Psalmist, “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10). David recognized this fact when he praised God, “But who am I, and who are my people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You” (1 Chronicles 29:14-16). David says, in other words, How can we give to You, God, because everything we have *You* gave us, so everything we give You is already yours?

The second is equally important: **God has entrusted to us certain**

possessions . . . things which He expects us to oversee. This commission appoints us as God’s stewards, managers or overseers of His possessions. Though there is a deeper theological meaning to the Parable of the Talents, one unmistakable implication is that we must take seriously our responsibility to care for *everything* our Master has given us, including our financial resources (a talent was a weight of money; cf. Matthew 25:14-30).

Follow the reasoning: (1) God owns everything, but (2) He has entrusted to us certain things, including financial resources. Thus the conclusion is undeniable: (3) We must be faithful stewards of *God’s* money (1 Corinthians 4:2).

This fact, once realized and embraced, will change the way we view money. No longer is it, in which area should we spend our money to bring us the greatest pleasure? But rather, how should we, as God’s stewards, spend His financial resources to please Him and bring Him glory? That will inevitably alter the way we spend. Where previously giving to the local church may have been something of an “obligation”, a “burden”, and even a “necessary evil” of Christianity, now giving back to God that which is rightfully [His] becomes more than an overused prayer cliché, it becomes our way of thinking.

Refuse to believe that greater possessions equal greater happiness. It is the biggest lie that has been foisted upon any generation. It is propagated in flashy, thirty-second commercials and subtly suggested in full-page advertisements. It is the motivation behind big houses, sleek cars, and faddish clothes. It is the destructive lie that whispers in the ear of every American, “If you only had *this* car, *that* boat, *this* dress, . . . then you’ll be truly happy.” Companies pay advertising executives millions to convince consumers that they need

their products in order to be content. It is not enough to convince people that they *want* it; they need to *need* it.

But we must realize that a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15). It has always been a struggle for God’s people. In spite of an explicit prohibition, Achan thought that taking some of Jericho’s spoil would contribute to his contentment, so he took some . . . and lost his life as a result (Joshua 7:21-26). Do not set your heart upon riches, God says (Psalm 62:10). Do not labor to be rich, because riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven (Proverbs 23:4-5). One of the thorns that chokes the word out of Christians’ lives is riches (Luke 8:14). Covetousness is associated with other sins: fornication, extortion, idolatry, and drunkenness (1 Corinthians 5:10-11); theft, slander, and swindling (1 Corinthians 6:10). Let covetousness not be named among you, Paul writes (Ephesians 5:3). Put it to death (Colossians 3:5). But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things . . . (1 Timothy 6:9-11).

What is *your* attitude toward money? Do you find yourself pursuing it to the detriment of your relationship with God? Do you give to the Lord generously and cheerfully? If you struggle with it (and most Americans do), remember: God owns everything, and accumulating more will not increase our happiness. Contentment comes in following Christ and using *His* resources to further *His* cause.

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Temperance by John Daniel ----- continued from page 25

This is a challenge for all humanity. By those outside of Christ (as illustrated in Paul's own life) his dilemma was one of trying to follow the Law of Moses (Romans 7:14). He did that which he knew was wrong (7:15-17), and he failed to do that which he knew was right (7:18-19). He was imprisoned by his own body (7:22-24) and because he could not control self, self controlled him. For those in Christ the battle rages on! There is a conflict between the Spirit and the flesh (Gal. 5:16-17). There is a war that wages between the flesh and the soul (1 Peter 2:11). Yet there is hope! Hope in Christ, as Paul intimates in (Romans 7:24-25a) "O wretched man that I am! who shall

deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. . . ." We are no longer indebted to live after the flesh (Romans 8:12). The reason is that those in Christ have crucified the flesh (Galatians 5:24). Yes, the problem is real, yet the solution comes as we "crucify" the flesh and it begins in baptism. In baptism, our body of sin is put to death as we are buried into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3-6). As we rise from baptism, "to walk in newness of life", we are free to live for God (Romans 6:7, 12-13). Not that we are no longer tempted, but are free from the dominion (rule) of sin (cf. Romans 6:14). The battle may not be over, but now it can be won!

Controlling the self is a natural component to "growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." As faith without works is dead, so faith without "TEMPERANCE" is meaningless. Striving for excellence is not possible without it. Increasing in knowledge is nothing but an academic exercise, unless we are able to apply that knowledge by exercising "TEMPERANCE." As we development that Christ-like character, may we come to know Him who through "TEMPERANCE" offered Himself as a servant.

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