



## Temperance

What is temperance? The online dictionary gives the following description: *moderation or self-restraint in action, statement, etc.; self-control; habitual moderation in the indulgence of a natural appetite or passion, especially in the use of alcoholic liquors.*

Temperance or self-control is the last characteristic of the fruit of the Holy Spirit given by Paul in Galatians 5:23. The word in Greek is *enkrateia* (εγκρατεια). It is derived from the word *kratos*, strength, and occurs in Acts 24:25; Gal. 5:23 and 2 Peter 1:6.

The ancient Greeks and Romans esteemed temperance as a means to deliver oneself of his sentiments and feelings. They considered the one who has overcome all emotions to be the true man. Such a man restrains himself and faces any calamity in life with near contempt. He exercises inward disciplined strength. In the Hellenistic culture, this was the ideal of a free and independent man.

Yet, interestingly enough, this same pagan Roman culture promoted all kinds of lewd excesses of immorality and sensuality, and reveled in drunkenness, gluttony and enjoyed watching mortal violence in the arenas.

In today's society we see similar trends. On the one hand one is deemed to be master over himself when he can suppress his emotions, and remain unmoved by outward circumstances, but on the other hand the opposite of self-control is promoted. Our society promotes indulgence and pleasure to the highest extent. It urges us to seek pleasure, fun and amusement at the expense of nearly everything. One can sacrifice his faithfulness in marriage, one's family, even one's soul and eternal destiny in order to engage in pleasure in this life on earth. Therefore, our society delights to watch extreme violence as entertainment; it glorifies man's physical appearance, promotes free sexuality, glories in excessive drinking and gluttony, and engages in other hedonistic indulgences. The motto is "live it up". This is nothing new. In the days of the apostle Paul, heathens said, *Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die* (1 Cor. 15:32). Temperance is a virtue looked down upon in our postmodern culture.

Then we see in Galatians 5:23 that all the graces that characterize the fruit of the Holy Spirit are leavened by temperance. But we must understand well that the biblical notion of temperance is not the heathen ideal of an emotionless man, who is seemingly indifferent to all that befalls him, but it is rather trust and faith that God directs his life and that God shall lead all things to the wellbeing of His child. It is living in the only comfort in life and death, that I am not my own, but belong to my faithful Saviour. This is not pretending to be autonomous as the ancient Greeks desired, but it is living in deep dependence upon a faithful and loving God.

The aim of temperance for a Christian is not to promote his autonomy, but to maintain a certain purity and godliness. Temperance is exercised out of love to God, and for the well-being of his brethren. This is the fundamental difference from all secular and Hellenistic conceptions.

Biblical temperance as a gift of the Holy Spirit is a vital characteristic of a Christian. It gives flavour to all the other graces. Devotion to God without discretion is like a hasty servant running without proper guidance. Zeal for the Lord without temperance will degenerate into legalism. Love without temperance will turn into emotionalism. Patience without discretion can lead to complacency. Brotherly love without temperance can lead to foolish conduct. Temperance sees to it that knowledge will not cause pride. Without temperance fear changes into despair, grief into bitterness, and hope into presumption.

Temperance lives by faith, hope, and love, and it leads people to demean themselves so as to not despair in want, or live excessively in abundance. Temperance delivers from immorality, pride, gluttony, and substance abuse. It is a God-given safe-guard not to grieve the Holy Spirit and to cultivate and maintain a life of living communion with God. It is a rich blessing.

Temperance or self-control will provide rest and peace in the soul and an uninterrupted walk in the fear of the Lord. It will be a most welcome friend in our soul and function as a safe-guard against foolishness. It will deliver us from grieving the Holy Spirit and inflicting unnecessary hurt to those around us.

Let us pray fervently to the Lord to grant us the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Remember (Luke 11:13)

*"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall (your) heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"*

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