

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Mennonite Perspective

From The Editor's Desk.

This month's edition concludes the message on overcoming temptation.

Having recently read again the Epistle of James 1:1-15 we would like to share some gleanings from pondering that passage on temptation.

Temptation, as used in the first part of James, seems to refer more to the trials and afflictions that we face, temptation is anything that hinders us in our Christian life.

When we are in a trial, Satan has already begun his work in our mind. He did the same thing to Eve in the Garden of Eden through the serpent. He began to work on her mind when he asked, "Hath God said?" This does not say that we are already defeated. Rather, at a time like this, God promises to help those who ask.

If we do not have faith in God and his promises, we cannot expect to receive help from him. We must not only have faith that God can help us but also that God will help us.

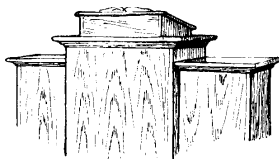
Do I really believe that God will give me the strength to overcome the trials I encounter?

Overcoming temptation requires endurance. Jesus encourages us to endure to the end. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Matthew 24:13. We cannot pray in faith and expect the Lord will come down and take away our trial. Paul wrote in two Corinthians 12 that he prayed three times that an obstacle would be removed. The Lord's reply was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." v.9 Paul's answer was, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities..... in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I'm weak, then am I a strong." v.10

We must endure, put forth our best efforts, fight the good fight of faith, and go forth like David, in the name of the Lord. 1 Samuel 17:37,45.

Let us never forget that we are tempted and tried because of the fleshly inclination within us that wants to have its own way. Temptations can come from within, such as the inward struggles of our own thoughts and desires. They can come from outward tests such as persecutions and physical handicaps.

But let us remember that these temptations when nourished bring forth sin and death but we have the promise of Scripture that: "... God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but with the temptation also will make a way of escape." 1 Corinthians 10:13.



Across the Pulpit.

Overcoming Temptation

*Part 2 of 2 from a message by Fred Carpenter
Given at Danskin Mennonite Church*

Editor's Note. Last month's message ended by asking us to consider the fact that as Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin, and what our thoughts were in relation to that and in what sense are those temptations common to man? The concluding portion of the message points out some of those areas we may have been considering.

Message Text Verses:

[Hebrews 4:14-16:](#)

"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. ¹⁵For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

[1 Corinthians 10:13:](#)

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Well in the first place, the most merciful high priest is common to all people. He is available to aid everyone who is tempted. He says that let us come therefore boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

In a sense, please don't misunderstand me what I'm saying here, the most merciful high priest is common to all people, He is available to all of us, we can all call upon Him. I don't mean to bring Him down to an earthly level by using that term that He is common to all people, He is great, he is a great high priest, I am not wanting to bring Him down but He is within reach of every one of us, he can be touched with the feelings of our infir-

mities, He was in all points tempted like as we are and yet He himself did not yield to sin.

Let's turn to Luke 4:1-16 and just read these verses and notice again how our Lord was tempted and how he overcame.

[Luke 4:1-16](#)

"And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered."

It is interesting here that it says that He was 40 days tempted of the devil and then when they were over He was tempted some more. Verse three:

³And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. ⁴And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. ⁵And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. ⁷If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. ⁸And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. ⁹And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: ¹⁰For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: ¹¹And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. ¹²And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. ¹³And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him..." For how long? "...for a season."

So he came back later and tempted Him some more.

Looking at verse 14:

¹⁴And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee:" I like that, even though he was tempted he wasn't weaker he still proceeded in the power of the Spirit, we read that in verse one and again in verse 14 that He returned in the power of the Spirit.

So to Scripture again, our text says that there has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. We are all tempted and we all have the flesh to deal with and we all face the devil and we also all have the Lord Jesus available to help us and in that sense this temptation is common to man.

I think we could also enlarge on that, maybe we should; sometimes individuals, in fact all of us, are tempted at one point or another to think that I'm facing something that nobody else has faced. And this Scripture tells us quite the contrary.

You know that any temptations that you and I can face in life there are many others who have faced the same temptation.

Who has not been tempted to be discouraged?

Who has not been tempted to feel badly toward a brother or sister in the flesh or in the Lord?

Who has not been tempted to desire things that we have no right desire?

Who has not been tempted you know to give up along the way?

You can add to that list, who has not been tempted to feel that I have it tougher than anybody else and nobody cares about my soul?

Who has not been tempted to think things like this?

Well these are things that are common to man, and who has not been tempted to think that: I'm just a nobody, I can't do anything worthwhile?

Well we've all been tempted with things like that – these are common to man but the fact is that Jesus Christ is the hope of all of us.

Now the text further says that God is faithful.

So we raise the fourth question: Where can we find our moorings?

Well this is the answer: But God is faithful.

God is faithful, He never failed, Jesus Christ never failed, God Himself cannot be tempted with evil, Jesus Christ in taking on the human body and facing the limitations of the human body subjected Himself to temptations that you and I experience. He grew hungry.

And you know is it right to say that He was tempted to eat too much or too eat at the wrong time like you and I are tempted. God is faithful, Jesus did not yield to that temptation and He overcame and you and I also can overcome.

Hebrews 4:16 we read that at the throne of grace there is mercy. When we have failed there is mercy and there is grace to help in time of need before we fail and that is the will of God for your life and mine. God is wanting to help us to overcome.

Hebrews 12:3 says: "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

To say when we are facing temptations that we think they are greater than anyone else has had let's start comparing our temptations with what Jesus was tempted with.

Now if you would take the whole of your temptations that you have experienced or if I would take all of the temptations that I have experienced in my life up to this point and add to that as much as I think I will ever be tempted with in my whole life and put that alongside that which Jesus was tempted with how does it compare?

Well you know even as I look at you brethren and sisters this morning I can see and knowing some of the things that you have gone through and comparing with what I have gone through I am not really worthy to talk to you this morning, but the fact is that we have endured nothing compared to what Jesus endured and we will never be called to face as much as Jesus faced and we should take courage in that.

Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself. You know whenever we are buffeted for our faults we have faults, Jesus didn't, He didn't have anything to be accused of because He lived a sinless life.

And whenever the devil comes to pass and says; You are rotten, you are terrible, you are just a worthless sinner! Well there is some truth to it you see, because that is what we have done, we have walked in sin. But of course we can't dwell on those thoughts, we can't allow the devil to take us down into despair because there is hope for us.

How do we get our moorings?

Why, God is faithful and God is there to help us to overcome in time of temptation'

So the Scripture says further: God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able.

Next question we raise is: How much can we bear?

The Scripture says here that God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, so how much can we bear?

Is it fair to say that we can beat of every temptation that comes to us on the basis of this Scripture?

It is isn't it? God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able.

The songwriter puts it this way in talking of this same thought he says that: "To thy strength He tempers the coldest wind that blows." And this Scripture is telling you and me that God is in the screening business we could say, that anything that comes to us as a temptation God has first of all permitted it or allowed it but any of it He would see that it is too much for us He would say, No. Just like He did for Job.

You know whenever the devil came into the presence of God there and God said: Have you considered my servant Job? There is none like him in the earth, he is perfect, he is upright, he fears God, he eschews evil. ([Read Job 1, 2:1-8](#)) And the devil said: Sure I know, I've seen him and I don't like what I see. (Putting it in my own words) and you are just being too good to him God. You know give them a little bit of a rough time and he'll give up. And God said: Okay, here is the line, right here, you can go this far and you can't go any further.

Now what did the devil do?

But you know what did God say first? Well you can touch his possessions, you say I've given him too much, his possessions are in your hands, do whatever you want.

What did the devil do?

Well you know what happened. One after another the messages came, Job, Job, your sheep, (I'd have to look to know what all the details are,) but the sheep are gone, the oxen and camels and the servants. You know one after another the messengers came and before the one was barely done giving his message the next one came with all his troubles and they just heaped them all upon Job, all at once.

Do you think that was intentional of the devil to gather them all together and heap them on to him the same day?

Well sure it was. Did you ever have a day like that?

Well you know how was your day? Well it was a pretty tough one, yes it seemed like the devil was heaping things on one after the other.

Well Job had a day like that too, in fact he had quite a few days, I don't know how many before he got through all of that temptation, the Scripture doesn't really tell us how long it was and you know we can read the book of Job and we can see what is happening but you know you can't read the book of Elizabeth, you can't read the book of Samuel or whatever your name is, we can't read that book, we can't see exactly what is happening but we can read the Scriptures and apply them to our own lives and realise that it is very much the same; that the devil is against us and God is for us and we can bear every temptation that comes to us.

And in Job 1 verse 12 God said

Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. [Job 1:12](#).

You know that the devil took that right to limit didn't he? And then he came back to God and still accused Job and then God drew the line in a different place He said: Behold he is in thine hand, save his life.

And so what the devil do to him?

Did he give him a cold?

Is that how the devil operates?

No, a whole lot worse than that, and that is how he works in your life and in mine, he doesn't do the least he can get by with but he does the most he can get by with to try and cause us to stumble.

Behold he is in thine hand, save his life.

And so there Job sat among the ashes with many boils, I've never had a boil but I have talked already to others who have who tell me that it is very painful and not only did he have one boil he had them from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet and he was sitting there in the ashes with broken pottery using it to scrape himself to find a little bit of relief.

But God saw that he could bear it and God allowed that, allowed the devil to bring that experience into his life.

The Scripture says here in our text: But God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above you are able.

And I think that when we are in the midst of experiences that test us we do well to come back to this verse, to this promise, God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above you are able.

I think of one man in the community who said to me one time he said: I wish I knew how to get weaker in relation to this thought, he didn't want to be tempted so hard, he said I wish I knew how to get weaker so God wouldn't allow him to be tempted so much.

Well that is one way to look at it, and other way is you know there is grace, grace from God to overcome.

And so that is what we want to look at in the last place here, the Scripture says that He will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it.

What is the way to escape?

But He will with the temptation also make a way to escape that ye may be able to bear it.

Well first of all it is the way of trust. [2 Peter 2:9](#) says:

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations," it is the way of trust. If we are going to overcome if we are going to find of escape we are going to need to trust in God.

It is also the way of prayer, [Matthew 6:13](#) Jesus taught us to pray "and lead us not temptation but deliver us from evil." It is the way of prayer.

You know whenever we realise that we are being tempted or we only realise after we have done something wrong but either way if we realise it before we have done wrong or if we realise that after we have done wrong we still need to do the same thing, we still need to call on the Lord for help.

If we have done wrong we need to confess to Him because He is the only one that can wash away our sins. [see [1 John 1:9](#)]

If we are being tempted we haven't done wrong we also can call upon Him. [Matthew 26:41](#) Jesus said to his disciples: Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.

When have you had temptations and can you name a week in your life or a few weeks in your life when you have had less temptations than otherwise, can you?

I can. I'll tell you where it was. It was when I was at Bible school and concentrated on the study of the Scriptures and I know some other people who can testify the same way that there have been less temptations in times like that than at other times, why?

Well it is a matter of what we have our minds filled with and whenever we are meditating on God and on His goodness and we are concentrating on the study of the Word then there just isn't as much opportunity for the devil to bring other thoughts to our mind.

It is a way of prayer.

It is also the way of avoidance.

The way to escape is the way of avoidance. [Proverbs 4:14](#): Enter not into the path of the wicked.

Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away.

Now there are times when we cannot do that, if you want to get from here to the ferry there aren't too many options there is basically one road to go, but there are times whenever we can bypass the main street and we can bypass some of the sights, you know especially in the summertime that could be a real source of temptation to us.

We don't have to go into the supermarket frequently, we don't have to stop at the 711 everyday, we don't have to do that, and we can do some choosing about where place ourselves and thereby we can minimise some of the temptations that we could face.

Enter not into the path of the wicked, avoid it, turn from it, and pass away.

It is also the way of preparation for conflict.

[Ephesians 6:13](#): Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God.

This is the way of escape. We need to realise that we are going to face temptations, we are going to face our own carnal nature and so whenever the thought arises, you know, to have a bad attitude toward someone else, right there when I recognise it as an appeal to me, a temptation to me that is when I need to take the armour of God and before that, before I take the whole armour of God I can also prepare myself at the beginning of the day by reading the Scriptures and praying and asking God.

Maybe there is a particular area in my life that I am struggling with, well let's ask God at the beginning of the day to help me have victory in this area.

And you know the devil is really good at bringing things around our back, things that we really weren't expecting, but if we are aware where we are facing temptations we can arm ourselves there.

Take unto you the whole armour of God the Scripture says, that you may be able to stand in evil day.

The way of escape is purpose of heart.

Daniel 1:8: But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the King's meat.

You know as I think of, I recall right now the words of a young man that I worked with when I was a youth, he was older than I but he spoke about a particular temptation that he had, I don't think he made any Christian profession whatever, it didn't sound like it according to some of the things that he was talking about, but he was faced with a particular temptation and he said he decided not to do it.

Well you know even a sinner has that power, he has the choice, he has the power of choice to decide to do good or to do evil and I realise that if he doesn't have the help that he could choose, sometimes he will be overcome when he doesn't want to be if he doesn't have God helping, but still even sinners decide.

You know there are some people who have avoided quite a few evil things just because they have decided: I'm not going to do that.

And we have that power of choice; it is purpose of heart whenever we seek the grace of God in our lives and couple that with our purpose of heart then it goes a lot further.

The way of escape is the way of yielding to the stronger master.

Romans 6:13: Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin but yield yourselves unto God.

You know, who is stronger? You or the devil?

Well there is no question – it is the devil.

And who is stronger? You or God?

Well there is no question – it is God.

Now who is stronger - the devil or God?

And again we know the answer – it is God.

So whenever we yield to temptation we are yielding to the weaker master. Have you ever thought of it that way?

When we yield to temptation then we are yielding to the weaker master and we don't need to do that, we don't have to – God has given us the power of choice.

So the way of escape is yielding to the stronger master, just submitting yourselves to God.

[James 4:7](#): Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Resist the devil, with standing, stand up against him, oppose him. That is the thought that Strong's gives in relation to this word resist.

And further the way of escape is the way of following in Christ's steps. We notice in Luke 4 we read that: Man shall live by every word of God.

That is the answer – live by every word of God, fill our minds with what the Scriptures teach and order our lives according to them.

And a closing Scripture now: [Luke 4:8](#): Worship the Lord thy God and serve Him only.

That is what Jesus taught us to do, it is the way we overcome.



Mennonites and the Lord's Day Observance

The New Testament does not define in detail what is acceptable for the Lord's Day. We are not bound by the Old Testament Sabbath restrictions, but the Bible is clear that man needs a day of rest. Based on the writings of the apostles and the practice of the early church, Mennonites observe this day of rest on the first day of the week, the day of our Lord's resurrection. Distinction between Mennonites and other religious groups around them in

how they observe the Lord's Day was not nearly as pronounced in the previous centuries as it is today. Throughout the year 1926, The Gospel Herald published eight articles relating to the Lord's Day, and another twenty-nine articles followed throughout the next decade. This paper heralds the concerns of the church with these words, "Decline in religion and decline in Sabbath observance go hand in hand." "Take the influence of the Sabbath out of the last 300 years and it would be like taking the intellect out of a man."

Menno Simons writes of the Mennonites of his day: "They keep and sanctify the Lord's Sabbath ... not by wearing fine clothes, not by carousing, drinking, vanity, and idleness, as the unthinking world does on its external Sabbath and holy days, but by the fear of God, by a clear conscience and unblamable life, in love to God and their neighbors (which is the true religion) keeping and sanctifying it to the Lord eternally. They do not attend the public gatherings ... in order that they may, out a pure heart and fear of their God, in the gathering of the saints and the true service, convince the erring and thus make manifest the truth and true doctrine to the benefit and betterment of all mankind." As Menno notes, the Anabaptists were known for their refusal to attend "church" on Sunday, but that was the state church. They readily assembled in their own groups throughout the week.

In America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Mennonite church service schedule reflected the realities of pioneer life. Prior to automobile transportation, the Sunday worship service took basically the whole day with little time for anything else. Therefore the worship services were held bi-weekly or once a month to allow time on "off" Sundays for families to attend neighboring congregations or to spend the day visiting other families. However, for many families on the Outskirts or in the "backwoods," this schedule on many Sundays left them with no church reasonably close to go to. This resulted in very irregular attendance habits. This also allowed opportunity for exposure to other denominations. Because of this and the rise of Union Sunday schools, many young people gravitated toward other Protestant churches.

The mid-1800s saw an exodus of youth from the Mennonite Church. In 1870, Levi Blough voiced his concern in the Herald of Truth: "It seems to me that we could do a great deal more for the young and rising generation if we had church at least every two weeks in all our church houses ... Think

of it; to open our churches only thirteen times in one whole year for regular services, when we could open them hundreds of times for services, such as preaching, singing and the Sabbath schools, and thereby draw our dear young people to those higher and nobler things of life."

The first Mennonite Sunday school was started in Ebytown, Ontario, around 1839. However, the Lancaster Conference waited until 1871 to endorse this new department of church work in their congregations. Only in the late 1800s did Mennonites in America start having additional Sunday evening services.'

Where did Mennonites in these times draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable Lord's Day activities? Listen to Noah Mack share his convictions: "One Sunday morning . . . while getting ready to go to church; I noticed that I could make it handy for the cats to get at the rats in the corn crib by prying off a little board. The Spirit said, 'It is Sunday today'; but I continued till I had carried out my mind. However, I had to repent and confess my disobedience before the Spirit would respond to my meditation for the Sunday morning sermon. Not long after that I was throwing shredded fodder down into the entry for the horses. Suddenly the Spirit's voice said, 'That's enough for today (Sunday).' I set my fork down for that very second. I remembered the former lesson on that point."

A Mennonite writer in the 1930s cited five areas that challenge Mennonites to keep the Lord's Day holy: Sunday milk sales, Sunday work for an employer. Sunday automobile travel, Sunday feasting and Sunday harvesting of perishable crops. Many farmers in those days set their milk cans out on Sunday for the milkman to pick up. A brother from Missouri did not set his milk out on Sunday, and later in the week his wife turned this milk into cheese.

One young man learned that his prospective employer expected him to put in some Sunday hours. His teaching from home helped him to pass this test and refuse the job.

The idea of automobile travel was still quite novel, and the previous writer further sharpens the point against buying gas on Sunday. "Let us not be too ready to put whatever happens in the ox-in-the-ditch class. If our ox gets in too often it might be good to leave him there a Sunday or two just to teach him a lesson. And if that doesn't help we might fill up the ditch or get a new ox.'

The same writer observed that the practice of the day occasionally kept

the housewife home from church in the morning to prepare the noon meal for guests. At the table the men-folk tended to overeat and consequently lounge about sluggishly in the afternoon, while the womenfolk toiled over sink and counter to clear away the spread.

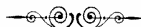
In relation to the harvesting of perishable crops, some defended it, claiming that the sin of allowing it to go to waste was a bigger sin than picking it on Sunday. The writer suggests the farmer watch the crop and pick it before it is perfectly ripe if necessary so that neither sin is committed.'

Observers of the Mennonite landscape in the 1960s made this observation, "[In the years previous] there were many articles in our church papers on the importance of the Lord's Day, along with warnings against its desecration. Gradually these articles became fewer in number, and finally ceased."

On a typical Sunday in the 1960s, you may have found the typical youth of Lancaster Conference with his family, visiting relatives or friends or with other youth from his church walking the streets of Harrisburg passing out tracts like *The Way*. However, you may have found him the next Sunday in the community tennis court competing with a friend, or you may have seen him and some friends stop at the local dairy bar on the way home to cool off. But many of these youth had parents that had planted good seeds of respect for the Lord's Day by teaching them to prepare food, clean the house, throw extra hay down from the mow, and fill the feed carts on Saturday to reduce chores the next morning.

Those youth from this generation who participated in the revival movements of these decades tended these seeds of Lord's Day respect to new levels. While they themselves recall Sundays of active ball playing, bicycling, and skating, they steadily endeavored to keep these activities to a minimum. They also drew new lines for their families, like excluding all money games, most schoolwork, and assembling model kits that involve tools such as a screwdriver.

Remember: "The tides of spiritual life and Lord's Day observance rise and fall together." What will history say of our respect for the Lord's Day? *From Volume XVI, No. 1, The Historical Journal, Eastern Mennonite Publications, April 2010.*



THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

Our title is taken from the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:15. There he exclaims, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." When the apostle Peter commended the faith of the believers in Jesus, he also spoke of their unspeakable joy in Him. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" 1 Pet. 1:8-9.

The essence of Christianity is not in experiences of overpowering emotions of bliss. But one's religion will be cold and empty if there is no feeling or warmth of spirit relating to what Christ Jesus has done for him or her. True, not all tears are sincere or genuine. There are tears of hypocrisy meant to impress others. There are tears of false repentance, intended to draw attention away from an unchanged heart, like a nesting mother bird that flutters away simulating a broken wing. But there are times when emotions express the heart's deep thanksgiving and joy when words fail. In that sense, all true Christians can testify to the unspeakable gift and unspeakable joy the apostles write about.

Who will find fault and does not feel with the sinful woman who came to Jesus when our Lord was in Simon the Pharisee's house? The account says, "And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" Luke 7:37-38.

Jesus' host was silently indignant (v. 39), but the Son of God discerned the whited tomb that was Simon's heart. Christ then asked him the question whom would love the most, one who was forgiven little or one who was forgiven much. "Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged" (v. 43). "And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon ... she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head ... since the time I came in [she] hath not ceased to kiss my feet ... [she] hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore ... Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much ... "(vv. 44-47).

Reading that sacred account touches our hearts and hopefully, it produces more than emotion but also action that verifies our devotion to Christ.

Sometimes we remark that a certain person "just doesn't get it!" Perhaps betraying a certain amount of frustration, we mean to say that he or she, despite explanations and instructions, misses or ignores the point. Might it be that we who name the name of Christ in our day are "not getting it" either? Do we understand the real reason the above account was included in the Scriptures? We can be church members and children of Christian parents, but unless we are bound to Christ in brokenness, loyalty, and obedience because we love Him, we are missing the point. Sad to say, evidence indicates that some are disconnected from the real heartbeat, or lifeline, of salvation and the faith in Christ Jesus. Far from being an "unspeakable" gift, salvation and the faith, to some, are only appendages to their lives.

We need to allow the Holy Ghost to bring us again and again to the foot of the cross and show us our utter wretchedness and hopelessness. Only then do we truly see Jesus suffering for us in such a way that we are affected. That's what it's all about. There the gift becomes unspeakable.

Several months ago my wife and I glimpsed a feeble picture of what we're trying to portray here. Because of renal failure, one of our married daughters needed someone to donate a kidney for a transplant. Her younger brother volunteered. Some forty-eight hours after the surgeries, the daughter was looking like a changed person as the "new" kidney cleansed her blood of a heavy load of toxins. Her brother was still suffering, more than his sister was.

Several days after the transplant, she made her way to his room for the first time after surgery. She had a jubilant smile; she was feeling so much better already. But nearing the bedside of her brother, the smile faded away. She beheld him suffering for her. Beginning to weep, she cradled his head in her arms and said several times, "I love you so! Thank you so much for what you've done for me!" Her deep emotion expressed the value she placed upon his gift to her.

The truth was that she had a new lease on life because of his sacrifice. Furthermore, a part of him was now actually in her, purifying her body of eventual death-dealing elements. On her part, she had the powerful motivation of deep feelings of indebtedness and thankfulness, helping her ignore the pain that bending over her brother required. Beyond this, she carries a keen sense of hope and anxiety that his "gift" will not have been given in vain. Will she ever lightly regard her benefactor, or even turn against him and despise him?

In a small way, this may illustrate the unspeakable gift Christ has given us. How the church stands in need of a continual renewal of that spirit of thankfulness and indebtedness! Unless we get the picture, and live accordingly, all other efforts are in vain. All our labors in the kingdom must have this end in view, or they are futile. All our counseling together and all our good resolutions will be of no avail unless the above-described spirit takes possession of the hearts of brothers and sisters, young and old.

That deep feeling of indebtedness toward Christ, and the resulting loyalty and zeal for the faith, must be the heart of our Christian lives. Then there would be no "wheelbarrow" Christians, no casual and shallow way of living. How could one lightly regard the suffering of the Lamb of God in his behalf, or even turn his back on Him and disregard the unspeakable gift?

"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

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More Than Conquerors: Conquering Intemperance

From a message given at Valley View Mennonite Church, June 2002.

We are looking at the idea of temperance, and the title is "Conquering Intemperance."

I) I would like to look first of all at defining the concept. I would like to begin looking at a number of Scriptures.

II) Then in the second part I want to spend most of our time looking at identifying the characteristics.

III) Then finally looking at some helps — practical helps to conquer intemperance.

I) The word 'intemperance,' is not found in the Bible in the King James Version as far as I know. We do however have a word which is a synonym. 2 Timothy 3 describes conditions which prevail during what it calls the last days. It calls them perilous times. Verse 3 describes people, "Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent,

fierce, despisers of those that are good.” The word that I am looking at is the word “incontinent.” That word means “to be morally powerless,” or “lacking moral strength.” We see some of that today. We are living in the last days. The Greek root word of this word incontinent is the word *kratos* [Strong’s # 2904] which means “strength,” and the word incontinent is a negative word. It means “to lack self-control.” Temperance means “self control,” intemperance means “lacking self control.”

The second reference I would like to turn to is Galatians 5:22-23 and this is a familiar Scripture. We probably know it from memory (or at least a lot of us do). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” Temperate means “to be self-controlled.” It is interesting again that it is the same root word in the original meaning “strength.” I like the word self control a little better than the word temperance because the word temperance has come to mean “abstinence from alcoholic beverages.” Now, that certainly is involved. It is however only one form of self control.

Self control has to do with various powers or capacities that God has created man with. The use of the word *temperance* in Galatians 5:23 indicates that man’s powers — his capacities, potentials, what he can do, what God has blessed him with, as well as his will, must be under the controlling, operation or power of the Spirit of God. The fruit of the Spirit is temperance.

I will briefly list several other references. Perhaps you can study them a little further. Acts 24:25 (this is the experience of Paul before Felix). It says there . . . as Paul, “Reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” We would deduct from that verse that righteousness (right living) represents God’s claims, and self-control is man’s response to God’s claims. The apostle Paul reasoned of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment.”

Also 2 Peter 1:6 (the passage that talks about spiritual arithmetic) says, “And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness.” Temperance always follows knowledge. Knowledge brings responsibility. What is learned must be put into practice.

Another reference is 1 Timothy 3:2, 11. The word is not translated “temperate” in our King James Version. Instead it is translated “vigilant.” “A Bishop must be . . . temperate.” “A bishop then must be blameless, the

husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.” It means “self controlled in the area of emotion.” Verse 11 “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” Again, the word “sober” means “temperate,” and it means “to be serious minded and vigilant.” It means to be watchful as a watchman would be — watching for danger.

On the other hand (on the other side of the coin) intemperance what does it do? It indulges the capacities and potentials God has given man. What does indulgence do? It intoxicates and makes a person dull — dull of hearing, dull witted and so forth. It is the opposite of being vigilant. I would like for us to see in the next few minutes that intoxication can occur by a number of different things, not only by drinking the wrong thing.

Another reference is in Titus 2:1-2, “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.” The word temperate there has a more specific meaning. It means “to be moderate in our opinions or in our passions.” I want to enlarge on that thought.

II) Identifying the characteristics of temperance. I would like to begin by observing a general principle which I believe is Scriptural. Then, I would like to look at a few general areas: 1) appetite, 2) passion and 3) emotion. Those three things are examples of powers or capacities which God has created for man’s enjoyment, betterment, and fulfillment. This is the general principle that I would like to observe. Those things God has given us. However, God’s intent for those things is only realized when man is under the control of the Spirit of God. Temperance in all of these areas brings out godly graciousness and beauty. Intemperance in any of these areas ruins both individuals and societies.

I would like to use an illustration that we would find in the Old Testament from Amos 6. It is a Scripture that I am not sure if I understand it fully, but I do believe I understand it much better than I did some years ago. As you read down through here, what does it mean when it says, “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion?” in Amos 6:1 first of all, then looking at verses 4–6,

[Amos 6:4-6](#)

“That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; ⁵That chant to the sound of the viol, *and* invent to themselves instru-

ments of musick, like David; ⁶That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.”

Looking at verse 5, there was a time that I was not sure what this was saying about David. The Scriptures said that David was a man after God’s own heart. Why does it criticize those who do what they did? This is, I think, an illustration of the principle that I am trying to convey, and we could ask a number of questions.

Verse 1 — Is it wrong to take it easy sometimes? To take our ease and have a little bit of relaxation, is it wrong? Verse 4 presents a very obvious question, Is it wrong to take a nap on the sofa? Again in verse 4, Is it wrong to dine? It specifically lists veal and mutton. Is it wrong? Verse 5 — is it wrong to sing? Is it wrong to listen to music? Verse 6 — is it wrong to enjoy a good drink on a warm day? I know it may specifically refer to alcoholic beverages here. We will enlarge it and simply say a good drink on a warm day, a soda or a fruit punch or something. Is it wrong? Then again in verse 6 it says they, “anoint themselves.” Is it wrong to use deodorant or similar scented items? I think the answer to all these questions is obvious. The answer is “No, it is not wrong,” but very easily we can indulge ourselves in any of these areas. We can go to excess. Those are excesses that we need to avoid.

1) *Our appetites.* God has created us with appetites. Sometimes we think of our appetites singular, but actually appetites are plural. There are a number of appetites. An appetite is an instinctive desire. One example is the appetite to eat or drink. It is instinctive. We do it to preserve life. Appetite can also refer to inherent cravings such as insatiable appetite for work. Sometimes we call such a person a workaholic. Appetite relates to a person’s or a culture’s tastes or preferences such as an appetite for elite or lavish lifestyle.

I might as well insert this now. I think it is okay if we feel a little bit guilty as we look at some of these things. *An appetite for an elite or lavish lifestyle or a preference for the gourmet foods.* That has to do with appetite. It is not wrong to enjoy eating or drinking. “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is easy for us to understand that a thirst for alcoholic beverages can easily be out of control. A person gets drunk. It intoxicates. It is addictive. A person gets addicted to that sort of thing. As I mentioned be-

fore, to some people temperance is all about teetotalism. However, it involves more than that. We agree that it includes abstinence from alcohol, but temperance is all about a lot more than alcoholic drinks.

What about eating? Most of us in North America [and the Western world] get enough to eat. I think that is obvious. Most of us probably eat too much. Some of us can get away with it. Some of us cannot. I think that some of us who can get away with it maybe ought to feel guilty. Though we may get away with it, this does not mean it is okay. I personally enjoy food. I enjoy cooking on occasion. However, I enjoy eating a whole lot more than preparing the food. I like Mexican food. You know what happens. The temptation is there, and I guess I will be candid with you all; sometimes I eat too much. In fact quite often, I am afraid. When we eat more than what we need, I think we are eating too much. The Bible calls this gluttony or intemperance. I would like to challenge us to use self control.

Another appetite that I will talk about for a few minutes is the desire to indulge our wants. It might be the desire for more gadgets, knickknacks, labour-saving equipment, or a newer more plush vehicle. That is an appetite. I think we can call it that. Many manufacturers cater to this desire with a system of planned obsolescence. How many of you have heard that term, ‘planned obsolescence?’ Do you know what it means? It simply means that manufacturers, generally speaking, do not build something good enough that it could not be improved upon, because they are appealing to our general weakness. One person has called this gluttony and I think in some ways it is an accurate term. Manufacturers appeal to men and women’s insatiable desire for something newer, plusher, and better. Their sales depend on that. That is not all wrong. Competition is good. Improvement is good in some ways, but how do we respond to this pressure? How do we relate to our own desire to make it nice for ourselves? Is it wrong to indulge ourselves? I would like to use the Biblical word ‘indulgence,’ for a brief example. The Biblical word indulgence is used two ways in the Scripture. The one sense of the word implies liberty, ease and relaxation. I believe it is God’s will for us to enjoy those things. One example would be of the apostle Paul and how he was indulged or he was set free. He was given his “liberty” (Acts 24:23). The Lord intends for us to enjoy those blessings in a temperate way. The other meaning of the word is “a filling up and a fatness.” In other words, indulging the flesh. I use

that word *fatness* or *fullness* in a Biblical sense. In the sense that Sodom was condemned for “fulness of bread” (Ezekiel 16:49). What were the sins of Sodom? One of them was “fulness of bread.”

Also Jeshurun was condemned for waxing fat and kicking (Deuteronomy 32:15). I am saying that we do experience indulgence. We do not have the controlling factors in our society that some societies have. We are allowed to freely travel. We can work the jobs we want. Some societies and some governments do not allow it. Therefore, we need to use the grace of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit to control ourselves. I believe God’s power is sufficient, Is it not? With indulgence, as we experience it, and our accompanying temptations, are we temperate enough to discipline ourselves and find a balance between asceticism and gluttony? I leave that challenge here.

2) *Our passions.* Passion can be a virtue. It is what produces devotion to the Lord. It is what produces devotion to a spouse (or at least part of it). It can give a person enthusiasm, colour, or intensity. It gives them strength of character. On the other hand, when temperance is not exercised, passion is vice. I will mention some examples. *What about opinions?* One of the Scriptures we looked at had to do with opinions, that is Titus 2:2. It zeros in on self-control and passion or opinions. Some of us have opinions. Some have more opinions than others. Some of us know which shelf in the refrigerator the mayonnaise must be on, and it is probably good to have a special place for it. Some of us know which vehicle manufacturer builds the best cars, or what tractor manufacturer builds the best tractors. Some of us know what Revelation 13 means. We have it all figured out. We have our opinions, and it is not wrong to have opinions. However, it is wrong when we become intemperate and lose our coolness and our common sense and we argue heatedly and say vehement things. We become intemperate and we cannot listen to reason.

What about anger? This is another area of passion. The Bible says, “Be ye angry, and sin not” (Ephesians 4:26). I would like to suggest that there is one form of anger that is not sin. I will call that “temper.” Remember we are talking about things, powers and capacities which God has given us. They can be either good or bad. Temper is what makes us stronger and more resilient. It helps us persevere for right even under negative pressure. As tempered steel is more useful than a mild or untempered steel, so a tempered expression of anger strengthens character. Let

me quickly add what I mean by that. I will illustrate it this way. I suppose all boys pull weeds, but when I was a boy I had to pull weeds. I never liked it, but I had to. In fact, I like it now because I probably learned to like it. There were some weeds that I had to get mad at to make them come out. That is a little bit the way temper is. We need to get “mad” and I use that in quotes, not that we express wrath or bitterness but temper gives us strength of character.

Now, the Bible lists two intemperate expressions of anger. One is bitterness. Bitterness is clearly an expression of the flesh. The Bible says, It is sin. Bitterness is anger that is bottled up for days, months and maybe even years. It destroys both physical and spiritual health. The second expression is wrath. We sometimes call it, ‘losing our temper.’ Or sometimes we call it a “Mount Vesuvius.” When it is all over, there is a bunch a lava and ashes laying around. While it was happening there was a lot of fire and the Bible says that is sin. Harsh, unkind words and maybe even tools or toys fly around. It is called wrath and it is intemperate.

A third area of passion I will quickly mention, is something I call “eros.” I will define it simply this way, within marriage it is an aspect of love, outside of marriage the Bible calls it lust. It is a very important and a very beautiful part of marriage. However, when it is expressed indiscriminately and indiscreetly or when it becomes mere lust, love becomes cheap and meaningless. It loses its value. In marriage love must be expressed temperately and you can jot down the reference 1 Corinthians 7:5. Additionally, temperance in this aspect of marital love will keep the display of physical affection away from the public’s eye. I think today that people are losing [that restraint or reserve] (in fact I know that they are). People are not temperate in this area.

Temperance also defines how courting couples should relate to each other. Temperance in this area of eros is why we talk about the ‘hands off policy.’ I am not sure if I could turn to a Scripture that says, “You should not have physical contact as dating couples.” However, it is a general Bible principle that we must be temperate. We avoid expression in some areas to add beauty and graciousness in another. And that is exactly one of these things. Refraining from physical contact until after marriage brings a richer, or a greater fullness and richness to that aspect of marriage.

3) *Our emotions.* Temperance and emotion. Emotions are feelings. They are what give us the capacity to rejoice with “Rejoice with them that

do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). They enable us to be sympathetic. Emotions care about other people. On the other hand, when emotions get out of control, you know what happens — a person “goes to pieces.” It is true that emotion is very closely related to passion, but I would like to focus in a slightly different direction.

I will give three illustrations or three areas. One is humour, the other is sorrow and the third one I will call the spiritual aspect versus the emotional. I will explain a little bit more, later. A) *The Bible says regarding humour*, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Proverbs 17:22). We probably would all agree with this whether it refers to a happy disposition or a good laugh, and there is a time for a good laugh, I believe. In fact, there are some things that are biologically good about a good laugh. Long after the Bible was written, people discovered that the Bible was right. A merry heart is good like medicine. It is probably only one of the times when the body systems can go into chaos and some good is done.

What am I talking about? Well, you know what happens, or at least a few things that happen. When we laugh, the heart rate increases, blood pressure increases, and the face might turn a little red. There are also some emotional benefits. However, it is possible to become intemperate in how much humour we use or appreciate. We can become immoderate in how we express our amusement. I have seen people becoming so amused by something very mildly funny. In fact, I did not think it was hardly funny at all, and they were almost rolling on the ground in hilarity. They were not controlling themselves. I wondered to myself, “What would happen if something was really funny? What was there left to do?” There was not a whole lot left to do, I suppose.

We need to remember that there is a place and a time for humour and then there is a time for seriousness. That is part of temperance to be serious, sober and vigilant. We become intemperate when we live to laugh, to have the latest story, to have the latest joke. We are intemperate also when we become so silly where everything seems funny. I have had that experience. I know some of you have had it too. It is intemperance.

b) *Sorrow*. It is very much a part of our lives. Since man’s fall there has been sorrow. We experience sorrow because of sickness and pain. Spiritual backsliding and apostasy bring sorrow. Death brings sorrow. Is it appropriate to express sorrow? If so, how? We teach our children that they do not need to scream as loud as they possibly can, when it is simply a

little scratch. I think that there is a principle of temperance there that I hope we can express as well. We are called to be temperate in our grief. I have observed funeral services, where the relatives of the deceased have screamed and shrieked until they lost control of themselves. Probably for days afterwards they were emotionally drained, because they did not contain themselves. The Bible says that we “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). I think there is a sense in which when we shriek and scream that we have lost hope.

Temperance keeps emotion in its place. I am thinking now of dividing between the emotional and the spiritual. I will give a couple of illustrations. Some years ago there was a young man who confided in me that he was discovering that he did not need to use a piano to have his private devotions. That might sound a little bit absurd but that is the way it was. I replied to him something like this. “You do not understand how to distinguish between the spiritual and emotional.” Do you know what I am talking about? There is a difference and it is very important that we understand what that difference is. Temperance helps us find our way through that.

Music primarily appeals to the emotion. It also appeals to the body. It is appropriate that it has those different aspects. The songs that we sing in worship appeal to our emotions. That is appropriate, but emotion is not worship. It can perhaps lend itself to worship, but it is not worship. We worship in spirit and in truth. I have observed church goers get so involved in both the physical and emotional aspects of music that they lose control of their faculties. They may perhaps go back over the bench or fall out in the aisle or something like that. That is not temperance. They think that it is spiritual. It is not. It is purely emotional.

I would like to say this very quickly. We need to be temperate in our use of music. I recognize that we do not worship every time that we listen to music, or every time we sing. However, our emotions must be subject to our spirits. That is why we are concerned about right music. That is why we have guidelines. Temperance keeps the emotions, and what appeals to them, in subjection to the will and the spirit.

The second example I would like to give in this example of emotion versus the spiritual is charismatic expression. We could possibly with a little time and practice, right here today (and maybe along with a good bit of relaxation in this area of temperance) have a totally different form of worship service. I am not sure if I have the ability to do this, but there are

some speakers who have the ability to *psyche* up an audience and get them so excited that they almost lose control of themselves. And then what you would need to do is start shouting some things in return, maybe waving your hands. I am glad when I hear a few “Amen.” I think that is appropriate. However, when we lose control of ourselves, and get all involved in the emotional aspect of worship (in fact it is not worship) in a service, we have lost grasp on that which is spiritual and that which feeds our soul or feeds our spirit.

The end result of such relaxation of temperance, and such an emotional expression is people on the floor rolling around. We may find all kinds of inappropriate physical contortions like the young men carrying the young women out and so forth, because they lost control of themselves. I will tell you one more thing. It all can be accomplished without any help from the Holy Spirit. I think we need to get that straight. The Holy Spirit is that which brings us into control. It does not cause us to lose control. Do we believe that? We must believe that or we will become sidetracked. I am not saying that emotion is out of place. There is some emotion that is appropriate, and we should feel some emotion as we hear the Word of God. However, for the most part, we focus on the spiritual.

III) *Five things that are practical helps for us in conquering intemperance.* 1) *We need to call it what it is.* It is not a weakness. It is not a thyroid problem. It is not a chemical imbalance. It is sin. We cannot expect to have victory if we do not call it what it is.

2) *Remember that our bodies (if we are saved) are the temples of God.* It does not matter if it is gluttony, anger, or inordinate affection, it is sin, and it defiles that temple.

3) *Listen when God speaks.* We need to ask the Lord to help us control our appetite, passions, emotions, or whatever area of life it is, that temperance should affect. Then, we need to be sensitive to the conscience and the work of the Spirit.

4) *Avoid temptation.* If we have a problem with alcohol, avoid the places that sell it. It goes without saying. If we have a problem with eating, get out of the kitchen. Get away from the ice cream, put it back in the freezer. Do not take any more. Put the lid on the candy dish. Simply get away from it. Choose the right kind of preaching and singing to listen to. If you are tempted to be angry, ask the Lord for grace. Take a deep breath, walk away for a few minutes. Do something. Avoid that which is sin in

anger. I will assure you that your angry feelings can dissipate by the grace of God without your expressing them. In fact, there have been recent studies that have proven this. I do not know why they need studies — the Word of God says it.

People used to say, “If you are angry, you have to get rid of it. Have your children sock it out on that pillow. Call the pillow ‘mommy’ and sock it out on that pillow.” Or, “If you have a friend you do not like, and are angry at — you have an enemy, not a friend, take it out on the pillow, call it ‘George,’ your enemy. Sock your feelings out on it.” Studies have now proven what the Bible has said all along. Anger is actually increased, or augmented when we express it. That is sin.

5) *Discipline yourself, by the grace of God.* Add this too, discipline your children. We do our children a big favour if we teach them self-control. I would like to use one more Scripture yet. 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 is a Scripture that we really need to look at. I will not read all the verses. I will only use verse 25 and we will close with this. “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.”

God help us. God bless us that we would be able to keep our bodies.

Brother James.



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