

Temperance



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 9:20–27, Prov. 20:1, 23:31–35, 1 Cor. 6:19, 10:31, 2 Pet. 1:5–9.*

Memory Text: “Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (*Philippians 4:5*).

He had been a respected judge, but he now lived in poverty, the victim of alcohol abuse. Because of this horrible addiction, which robbed him not only of his dignity but of his family and his livelihood, he had exchanged his robes of judicial office for the rags of a tramp. What a tragic ending to such a prosperous and useful life!

In 2007, newscasts were filled with the tragic news of the unnecessary death of a young woman who died from drinking too much water!

Water? Yes. As part of a radio contest, she drank an excessive amount of water and died later that day from water intoxication. Water, although essential for life and usually harmless, can kill when taken in excess.

This week we study about temperance in a world that regards excess as success. The illustrations above show that unhealthful things ought to be completely avoided, and healthful substances and practices should be used in moderation. In so many cases, moderation is the key element so often missing.

Let's take a look at what true temperance is about and why the Lord wants us to be temperate.

The Week at a Glance: As human beings, we have been bought with the blood of Jesus. Hence, we have a moral responsibility to take care of our bodies, and temperance is the key to fulfilling that responsibility.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 29.*

The Bible's First Drunk

What would you like your legacy to be? More specifically, for what would you like to be remembered after your death? That you were rich, popular, or politically powerful? What are the things that really matter?

All through the Bible we find characters who have left legacies. Some very good, some very bad, and some a mixed bag.

Look at Noah. Noah probably is remembered best as the first and not-so-successful evangelist. He preached for 120 years and only a handful of human converts chose to take refuge in the ark, and those were of his own immediate family.

God's view of Noah, however, was very positive. Amid the evil and wickedness of the antediluvian world, "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (*Gen. 6:8, NIV*).

How did Noah find favor with God? Why? *Gen. 6:9, 22; 7:1.*

Despite Noah's faithfulness and obedience and doing all that God has asked, there's another story that was recorded for us, as well. Read Genesis 9:20–27. What lessons can we take away from this sordid tale?

Noah achieved the notoriety of being the first named drunkard in the Bible. How sad that a man who did so much good for the Lord, who had been given so much responsibility, and who had been so highly regarded would fall as he did.

The mind is the channel for most communication, and it must be kept free from toxins and substances that may cloud reason and judgment. Noah's experience is a warning and example for our instruction that even the "best" among us, even the strongest and most faithful, are not immune to temptation and even to outright sin. Drinking would have been bad enough, but it appears that Noah went on a binge. If Noah could fall like that, what about the rest of us?

Do you know a well-respected church leader who has fallen in one way or another? It always hurts when someone we look up to stumbles and falls and disappoints us. How can we learn to extend the promises of grace even to those who, like us, really do not deserve it?

Alcohol Today

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, alcohol has been implicated in almost 1.8 million deaths per year; this translates into 3.2 percent of total deaths worldwide. The amount of alcohol consumed is rising steadily. Binge drinking (the consumption of four to five successive drinks in males and three to four successive drinks in females) is growing alarmingly among adolescents and young adults. This trend shows no sign of abating. Alcohol has consequences through intoxication, drunkenness, dependence (addiction), and other chemical effects on the body.

What instruction, experience, and warnings are found in the Bible that warn us against alcohol? *Judg. 13:2–8, Prov. 20:1, 23:31–35, Isa. 5:11, Eph. 5:18.*

Interestingly, long before any scientific description of the negative effects of alcohol on the fetus (fetal alcohol syndrome), Samson’s mother was warned not to take alcohol during her pregnancy. Solomon also warns against the effects of alcohol, specifically wine and beer. From his observation and possibly even experience, he describes how alcohol changes and modifies behavior, usually leading to regrets. Isaiah graphically describes how inappropriately priests behave when intoxicated, confirming the warnings given by the other writers. Paul, too, has words of caution regarding alcohol.

The biblical descriptions of alcohol consumption mostly reveal inappropriate and undesirable behaviors and warn against these.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (*1 Pet. 5:8*). We can be sure that the use of alcohol is one of the devil’s greatest traps. How many millions of lives have been ruined over the centuries through use of this dangerous drug, which is poison to both the body and the mind. How much better for ourselves and our loved ones were we to avoid this dangerous trap completely, with no compromise at all.

Who does not know people whose lives have been hurt by alcohol, either through their own use or through the use of others. Why take a chance for yourself? What steps can you take to help ensure that you, or your loved ones, never start down this dangerous path, which promises nothing good but only sorrow and heartache?

“But Isn’t Alcohol Good for the Heart?”

Since the early 1970s, debate has raged about the benefits of wine and alcohol on heart health. Much has been written in the lay and scientific press about studies done in France on this issue. In recent years, reanalysis of the data on the French population and further follow-up have cast significant doubt on the whole theory. Vested interests in the alcoholic beverage industry have kept the subject in public view. Many church members are wondering whether their health is suffering through their not drinking alcohol on a regular basis.

There is no literature at all to show any apparent or real benefit of alcohol to the health of young people. The claim of apparent cardiovascular health benefits of alcohol in the middle-aged population has been successfully challenged in recent scientific literature.

In the studies that showed apparent benefit, individuals who had been previous alcohol drinkers were included in the control (non-drinking) groups; some of these had stopped drinking because of alcohol-related health problems. These same control groups, in general, were in poorer health than the drinkers. Reanalysis of the data, correcting for these defects in study design, showed no demonstrable health benefits to moderate drinking, compared to the nondrinkers. Further, more analysis of the groups studied showed that those in the moderate drinking group who originally had been thought to have better health outcomes differed in other ways from the control group. They had better diets, exercised regularly, were of a higher socioeconomic status, and had better access to healthcare. This set of circumstances is well-known to be associated with improved health and longevity. The benefits in these studies were not due to moderate drinking but to other lifestyle practices.

How blessed we have been to have a health message that has warned us in detail of the ravages of these poisons, even before the epidemiologists did. How dangerous it is to seek what turns out to be a nonexistent health benefit in exchange for a wide spectrum of dangerous effects of alcohol. These range from impairment of motor skills and judgment to the potential destruction caused by trauma, violence, accidents, domestic violence, cirrhosis, cancer, addiction, and even dementia.

Even just one measure of alcohol impairs neurological function and may even trigger alcohol dependence. Most important, alcohol impairs our ability to make sound judgments and respond to the Holy Spirit. Who hasn’t seen people make utter fools of themselves, or even worse, through alcohol use?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31. How could this apply to the topic at hand? On a more personal note, how can you take that principle and apply it to your own life? What changes might you need to make in order to better manifest what the Bible says here?

Temperance in All Things

Temperance sometimes appears to be an outdated word. We often equate it with movements and organizations that focus particularly on alcohol and tobacco. We think of the old songs promoted by these movements and sung by our early church, warning young women about the disgusting habits of those who chew and spit tobacco. We almost caricature the whole issue, and we avoid mention of the word in our sophisticated age.

It sometimes is thought easier not even to talk about temperance. While we fail to talk about and instruct in temperance, some in our church are being overcome by things that were once thought to be problems only of *the world*.

Read 2 Peter 1:5–9. How should these words be applied to all areas of our life, particularly when it comes to our health habits? How can we take this biblical admonishment and turn it into reality for ourselves?

Temperance is so much more than not smoking cigarettes, taking illegal drugs, drinking alcohol, or even tea, coffee, and soft drinks. And that is because even good things, when taken to excess, can cause problems.

What are your work habits? Do you keep reasonable hours? Is there time for God, family, recreation, physical fitness, and service to others?

How much time do you spend sleeping, or are you working all the time? Or, on the other hand, do you sleep too much? Too much sleep, as well as too little, can have negative health effects.

What about diet? Maybe you do not eat pork or even chicken, but are you piling your plate so high with food that you barely can get up from the table when done?

We know sunlight is good for us. But too much can be a cancer-causing agent. Exercise, too, is important. Many do not get enough, while too much can hurt your body. Even sexuality, while a gift from God, can be taken to excess, with negative side effects.

Ellen G. White caught the essence of true temperance with this simple statement: “True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful and to use judiciously that which is healthful.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 562.

Look at all areas of your life. How temperate are you? In what areas do you need to change? Might you even now be suffering some negative effects from wrong practices? Why not seek some help in making needed changes?

Bought With a Price

The philosophy of many today is that our bodies belong to us, and we can do with them as we please. Some may justify this approach even further by adding the argument that in so living they harm no one but themselves. We know, though, that this kind of reasoning is so wrong.

What are ways in which the intemperance of others has hurt you or someone you know? Or, even more to the point, how might your intemperate actions hurt others?

The Bible talks of the importance of the body as a dwelling place. This abode is not only for our own benefit, thoughts, plans, and actions; our bodies are, in fact, temples of God. What a privilege and responsibility. Sometimes we are more caring of the houses in which we live than our own bodies.

Why should we take care of our bodies? What theme comes from the following texts that answers this important question for us? Why do these texts make sense only if God created us, as opposed to our being the chance results of purposeless cosmic forces? *John 2:19–21; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20.*

Jesus referred to His own body as a temple. Paul emphasizes this theme often and expands on it further by pointing out that we do not belong to ourselves. “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (*1 Cor. 6:19, 20, NIV*).

What a price was paid for our redemption. Only when we contemplate the Cross, and what happened there, can we even begin to understand our value and our worth before God. This thought alone should help us understand the sacred responsibility we have to take care of ourselves, not just spiritually but physically, as well.

God emptied heaven and allowed the blood of Jesus to be spilled for our redemption. We do not belong to ourselves; we have been redeemed and belong to God and owe Him our all, including faithful stewardship in the use of our bodies.

Dwell more on the Cross and what Jesus did for us. Why should that motivate us in all that we do? If you truly believe that Christ, the Lord, died for your sins so that you can have the promise of eternal life, shouldn't that take front and center in your life? How should this wonderful truth motivate you to take better care of your body temple?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Helping the Tempted,” pp. 161–169, and “Working for the Intemperate,” pp. 171–182 in *The Ministry of Healing*.

Despite the growing problem of obesity in many parts of the world, gluttony is encouraged and accepted. Type 2 diabetes is becoming more of a problem because of diet, obesity, and lack of exercise, affecting even teenagers. Addiction to Internet activities and pornography has fostered unthinkable cases of violence and sexual abuse. Tobacco continues to be the largest single cause of preventable death throughout the world—over five million deaths per year. There are warnings on the cigarette boxes; these go unheeded by many. Information is not preventive if we do not act on it.

God has given, through various sources, consistent guidance on how to be healthy, happy, and holy. Blessed we will be if we follow the counsel.

“‘Have faith in the Lord your God, and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.’ ” (2 Chron. 20:20, NIV).

“There are few who realize as they should how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their character, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny. The appetite should ever be in subjection to the moral and intellectual powers. The body should be servant to the mind, and not the mind to the body.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 398.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look at this quote taken from Friday’s study: “There are few who realize as they should how much their habits of diet have to do with their health, their character, their usefulness in this world, and their eternal destiny.” What does this mean in practical terms?
- ② How does the society in which you live impact attitudes toward temperance? Does it encourage temperance, or does it promote attitudes that make temperance seem outdated? Why is it important to be aware of these influences, and, if needed, how can you learn to help others, especially the young, be persuaded by them?
- ③ If possible, have a health expert speak in class about the right balance of things like diet, exercise, sleep, and sunlight.
- ④ Some people have the mentality that if a little is good for you, then a lot must be even better. For example, if a little salt is good for the body, then a lot must be even better for it. What’s wrong with that kind of thinking?

Another Power

by JOESIE DURANGO

Tay Juan walked through the village with his spear in one hand and his charms in the other. These were the signs of his power. He claimed to heal the sick or appease the spirits with slain chickens or a slaughtered pig. When tribal conflicts arose, Tay Juan restored peace.

As Sulads, student missionaries from Mountain View College, we had been warned about the powers of darkness we would face in the village. We knew that victory came only through a constant and close connection with Jesus. My partner and I prayed for God's strength and the Holy Spirit to boldly face Tay Juan and the powers of darkness.

When I finally met Tay Juan, his dignified bearing reminded me of Elisha, but the smell of alcohol and the smoke from his cigarette told me otherwise. "I am so happy that you have come to teach my people," he said. "You have risked your lives to come here. You sacrifice your own needs for the sake of others. I, too, will learn from you."

I felt so humble realizing that God had gone before us and had tamed the devil.

Tay Juan calls my partner and me his children. When we warned him of the dangers of tobacco and palm wine, he listened. "Thank you for telling me this," he said. "I didn't know that these things could destroy my body."

One evening he came to hear the children sing during our worship service. He loved the beautiful songs and asked for more. Tay Juan began attending worship every day. He listened to the songs and messages from God's Word.

And when two pastors came to baptize some believers in our village, we were surprised to see Tay Juan join the line!

Tay Juan gave his heart to Christ. One day he came to our cottage carrying a knife and a sword. "These weapons were my power, my protection from accidents and enemies," he began. "But I have a stronger power now and don't need these any longer." We prayed that God's protection would go with Tay Juan.

Tay Juan continues to heal the sick, not with incantations or sacrificial chickens, but with prayers to the Great Physician, Jesus.

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