

9. Temperance (2Q 2010—Health and Healing)

Biblical material: Gen. 9:20–27, Prov. 20:1, 23:31–35, 1 Cor. 6:19, 10:31, 2 Pet. 1:5–9, Phil. 4:5.

Quotes

- I am hungry. Therefore I am. *Garfield the Cat*
- To alcohol! The cause of—and solution to—all of life’s problems! *Homer Simpson*
- What a weird thing smoking is and I can’t stop it. I feel cosy, have a sense of well-being when I’m smoking, poisoning myself, killing myself slowly. Not so slowly maybe. I have all kinds of pains I don’t want to know about and I know that’s what they’re from. But when I don’t smoke I scarcely feel as if I’m living. I don’t feel as if I’m living unless I’m killing myself. *Russell Hoban*
- If they took all the drugs, nicotine, alcohol and caffeine off the market for six days, they’d have to bring out the tanks to control you. *Dick Gregory*
- How come if alcohol kills millions of brain cells, it never killed the ones that made me want to drink? *Anon.*

Questions

Why are temperance issues more than about drinking alcohol? If the problem is in excess, is drinking temperately OK?! What is the problem—health or social impacts? What are the dangers of not following a lifestyle that includes temperance? What would Jesus do, and why? Why did Jesus refuse drugged vinegar on the Cross?

Bible discussion

The story of Noah planting a vineyard and getting drunk on its produce leads to all kinds of problems (Gen. 9:20–27). The mocking, deceptive character of alcohol is proverbially identified (Prov. 20:1), while the sting in its tail is also made clear by someone who should know (Prov. 23:31–35). Since the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we are to honor God in our bodies (1 Cor. 6:19, 20), remembering that in all we eat or drink we do so to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Peter points to self-control (the opposite of what happens when you’re drunk—2 Pet. 1:5-9).

Comment

The experience of Solomon (Eccl. 2) is a salutary lesson for us today. He tried living for pleasure—but that brought only passing satisfaction. And he concludes that pleasure had no real meaning. It didn’t solve his heartfelt need for assurance and permanent meaning in life. So then he went on the booze, and with all his riches he could afford the very best wines. Something like Chateau Lebanon 971 BC! He tried to escape the pressing problems of pointlessness by refusing to think, by escaping into oblivion offered by alcohol. He tried to be happy by living in a drunken stupor. Did it work? Of course not. The same problems and questions still haunted him when he awoke, only then he had to deal with them with a head banging like a gong. Writing of his own experience he said, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” Prov. 20:1.

Those who have seen the consequences of addiction and substance abuse know all too well the terrible damage caused—not only to the individual concerned, but to family and friends, and the wider society. It almost seems that the objective is to hit our centers of higher thought. In this way through chemical means our minds are dulled, and the ability to think spiritually is compromised.

Our role here is to point out the consequences, and help those who have become trapped. As Ben Carson comments, “In the words of Jesus, we are to love God from the heart and our neighbors as ourselves. All are our neighbors—whether they are liars and thieves, or have behavioral problems, sexual problems, alcoholics, drug addicts—we must not shun these people. Where many become confused is the difference between accepting and embracing another’s philosophy. We don’t embrace the philosophy of a mass murderer in order to love him. Jesus is the perfect example—think of how he related to sinners like Mary Magdalene—and yet did not embrace or condone their lifestyles. Yet as a result of his love demonstrated for her, Jesus became for Mary her greatest friend.”

As a faith community we have committed significant resources to trying to help those with problems that stem from such abuses. We recognize that healing does not come automatically, and that we have to help change the causes that lead to risk-taking behavior. In this we demonstrate our care and concern for all the children of God.

Some have wondered about how alcohol is treated in Scripture. While there are texts that provide warnings, and stories that illustrate problems, the use of wine and other fermented drinks was clearly commonplace in the different societies. While recognizing the negative aspects, what do we with texts that tell us to give wine to the poor (Prov. 31:6, 7), or to use tithe money to buy alcohol and celebrate (Deut. 14:26)? We need to realize that God truly does meet people where they are and seeks to lead them to a better life and experience.

Ellen White Comments

Christ came to the world to bring back the character of God to man, and to retrace on the human soul the divine image... The Lord Jesus valued every human being, and could not endure the thought that one soul should perish. His great heart of love embraced the whole world, and led him to provide complete salvation for all who would believe in him. In the character of Christ, majesty and humility were blended. Temperance and self-denial were seen in every act of his life, but there was no taint of bigotry, no cold austerity, manifested in his manner to lessen his influence over those with whom he came in contact. The world’s Redeemer had a greater than angelic nature; yet united with his divine majesty were meekness and humility that attracted all to himself. {RH, April 14, 1896}

In order to reach the root of intemperance we must go deeper than the use of alcohol or tobacco. Idleness, lack of aim, or evil associations may be the predisposing cause. Often it is found at the home table, in families that account themselves strictly temperate. Anything that disorders digestion, that creates undue mental excitement or in any way enfeebles the system, disturbing the balance of the mental and the physical powers, weakens the control of the mind over the body, and thus tends toward intemperance. {CG 402-3}