

12. First Things First

“Temperance”

The knowledge of God as learned through the study of Christ’s life leads us naturally to invite Christ to reproduce His character in us. As Christ, through faith, has been transforming the mind—bringing it into harmony with His own mind—so now, He begins to change our very lifestyle. This work must begin with man’s greatest need.

“Temperance alone is the foundation of all the graces that come from God, the foundation of all victories to be gained.”¹

A clear definition of temperance is essential at this point.

“True temperance teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful, and to use judiciously that which is healthful. 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.”²

“Intemperance . . . includes the hurtful indulgence of any appetite or passion.”³

It is necessary to keep clearly in mind the fact that the battle between Christ and Satan is over who will control the mind of man. It would be natural, then, for Satan to do everything he could do to injure or weaken the ability of man’s mind. If he can cause the mind to function at a level below its God-given capacity, he has then gained a tremendous advantage over God. If the mind cannot understand the things of God, how can it arrive at a valid conclusion? It follows that the will could not be used in a constructive way. Satan knows that if the will is not used in a positive way, he has the

advantage. By creating doubts, peer pressures, etc., he can cause us to put off a decision. He is careful not to let us know that putting off a decision is really making a decision. It is exercising the will, but to his advantage.

“You should use the most simple food, prepared in the most simple manner, that the fine nerves of the brain be not weakened, benumbed, or paralyzed, making it impossible for you to discern sacred things, and to value the atonement, the cleansing blood of Christ, as of priceless worth.”⁴

“Intemperance commences at our tables in the use of unhealthful food.”⁵

Temperance, then, must strike at the root of the problem and from there spread to the entire lifestyle.

A perfectly balanced eight-point program was sent to us from God nearly seventy-five years ago to keep our mental and physical health functioning at top level. “Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power—these are the true remedies.”⁶

An almost unlimited amount of inspired information on this plan is open for our study in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White. If we accept these sources as authoritative, we then have a guide by which to measure all other information.

Modern research has finally validated God’s health plan, and abundant material is available regarding each part of the plan. God has enlightened men and women who have written authoritatively, yet in understandable language, on the different facets of this plan. We are today without excuse.

However, we shall confine ourselves to man’s greatest weakness—his appetite. If this is brought under the control of Christ, we will be victorious over every defiling sin.

“The controlling power of appetite will prove the ruin of thousands, when, if they had conquered on this point, they would have moral power to gain victory over every other temptation of Satan.”⁷

Webster defines temperance as “habitual moderation in the indulgence of appetites or passions.” He defines appetite as “an inherent craving.” It is as we see this close relationship, and the broad platform that appetite covers, that we can understand the above quotation.

Eve was tempted upon appetite. However, the real appetite was, no doubt, revealed in her unspoken question. Why had God withheld the fruit of this tree from them? It was this unspoken question, revealed in her attitude and expression, which prompted Satan to take advantage of the situation. “Yea, hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” Eve was captivated as she heard the serpent vocalize her own thoughts. How many today have an appetite to know the “why” of God’s ways. “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever . . .” Deuteronomy 29:29. When will we be content to believe what God says and leave the “why” until He chooses to reveal it to us?

Eve’s appetite revealed itself in other ways too. The serpent continued in a pleasing voice to praise her loveliness, *which she enjoyed*.

When appetite was partially fed, it was only a step to creating doubt in Eve’s mind, for she was conditioned to believe the voice that revealed such “*good*” *judgement*. She now answered the serpent’s subtle question, “. . . We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” Genesis 3:2,3. The serpent’s reply was quick and forceful, “. . . Ye shall not surely die.” Genesis 3:4. This direct contradiction to God’s statement was then reinforced by the implantation of a

doubt, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:5.

"He (Satan) is constantly seeking to excite a spirit of irreverent curiosity, a restless, inquisitive desire to penetrate the secrets of divine wisdom and power. In their efforts to search out what God had been pleased to withhold, multitudes overlook the truths which he has revealed, and which are essential to salvation."⁸

The doubt had found lodging in Eve's mind. But Satan must reinforce the doubt with feelings. Take another look at the ladder Satan tries to get us to climb.

He now took advantage of Eve's own argument and plucking the fruit, the serpent put it in the hand of Eve. (Notice how feelings destroy knowledge.) The serpent reminded Eve of her own words, "ye shall not touch it lest ye die." Satan speaking: "There it is in your hands and you haven't died. Eating is no different." She could detect no harm from what she had done so she grew bolder. Her mind remembered the serpent's statement that the fruit would make one wise so she ate. Now come the feelings. (Please keep in mind that the feelings are Satan's special avenue through which he works.) Eve felt no evidence of God's displeasure; she experienced an exhilaration which ran through her whole body. She even imagined that this was the way heavenly beings felt.

Have you ever felt the exhilaration of an indulged moment of sin? Satan has lost none of his power.

Eve, under the spell of feelings, became the instrument through which Adam fell. Through feelings Satan is still destroying or modifying the knowledge of God as revealed to man. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31.

Temperance would naturally follow knowledge in our lives if we would be willing to face the appetite problem. Of ourselves, we are helpless, but we have One by our side who is mighty to save. If we face our helplessness, and by an act of the will choose to apply the above Scripture, even if we have failed every so many times, God will bring our appetites under His control. Victory will then be ours. We will have dealt with “first things first.”

10/17/03

Notes

1 Temperance, p. 201.

2 Temperance, p. 138. (Italics supplied.)

3 Temperance, p. 137.

4 Testimonies, vol. 2, p. 46.

See also Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 55 and Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 327.

5 Testimonies, vol. 3, p. 487.

6 The Ministry of Healing, p. 127.

7 Temperance, p. 16.

8 Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 54, 55.