

# Church of God, The Eternal

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## Temperance—a Vital Fruit of the Holy Spirit

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Dear Brethren:

The fruits of God's Holy Spirit enumerated in Galatians, chapter five, describe essential characteristics for true Christians. Those who possess these qualities are manifesting the very mind of Jesus Christ in their behaviors, and such fruits can only result from the miraculous addition of God's Spirit to the human mind. What are those fruits which we must all learn to manifest? "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: . . ." (Galatians 5:22–23). Fruits like love, joy, and peace usually get greater attention, and they certainly are first on the list. But in this issue of the *Monthly Letter* we want to go to the very end of that list and address one of the little-mentioned fruits—temperance. Even though it is mentioned last, it is equally a reflection of God's mind. Therefore, manifesting true godly temperance is confirmation of the Holy Spirit in an individual, and lack of temperance is likewise proof of an absence—or lack—of the Holy Spirit. In that regard, temperance is just as critical as love.

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge *temperance*; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But *he that lacketh these things is blind*, and cannot see afar off . . ." (2 Peter 1:5–9) [emphasis mine].

What is real temperance, and how is it manifested? Most religionists think of temperance as avoiding alcohol or certain other physical vices. Moderation in physical appetites is certainly included in the principle, but there is much more to temperance as a fruit of God's Spirit. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines it as 1) moderation in action, thought, or feeling; restraint; self-control, 2) consistency; having the combination producing the desired state of the substance. One who is *temperate* is "keeping or existing in the middle ground between

extremes; not extreme or excessive." Are these definitions consistent with God's view of temperance? Is this what God recorded through the Apostle Paul as one of the key fruits of His very own Spirit? It certainly is! Furthermore, this more expansive concept of temperance—avoiding extremes—is crucial for God's people to master in these last days. This is the aspect of the topic we really want to emphasize. Those able to manifest real temperance in their lives—avoiding extremes—are in a much stronger position to face critical trials on the horizon before the return of Jesus Christ. Likewise, those lacking temperance in their mental orientation are headed for a great fall, sooner or later. We will soon see how and why this is true.

## Temperance Taught in the Bible

At first glance it would appear the Bible says very little about temperance. Only six verses in the whole Bible contain words translated as "temperance" or "temperate," and they are all in the New Testament. Here is one example:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 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. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, *not as one that beateth the air*: But I keep under my body, and *bring it into subjection*: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (1 Corinthians 9:24–27) [emphasis mine].

This passage confirms that the concept of temperance is the very same as we read from the dictionary definition: the ability to manifest control and moderation in one's actions and behaviors, avoiding wide swings and maintaining a steady course toward an ultimate objective. But is the fact temperance is mentioned so little—and not specifically in the Old Testament—reflective of its lack of consequence in God's mind? Not at all! Although this specific word is used infrequently, the Bible is replete with passages that bespeak the need for temperance. How then is the principle described in the Old Testament? Notice some examples [emphasis mine throughout]:

Let thine eyes look *right on*, and let thine eyelids *look straight before thee*. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. *Turn not to the right hand nor to the left*: remove thy foot from evil (Proverbs 4:25–27) .

Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: *ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left*. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess (Deuteronomy 5:32–33).

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: *turn not from it to the right hand or to the left*, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:6–7).

*Discretion shall preserve thee*, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; *Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths*: (Proverbs 2:11–15).

Being constant, steadfast, balanced, and resolute in sticking to the course is bound up in temperance. It is the antithesis of the example of those who begin with much zeal and fervor, but who eventually get distracted by other agendas and end up losing their sense of direction. Ones without temperance have crooked paths because they dart this way and that according to emotional whims.

By comparison, those who are temperate have a sound, levelheaded orientation toward God's Truth. That is why it can be described so well by metaphors about traveling a straight path. One who sticks to the path and avoids falling into the ditches on either side, avoids taking wrong turns off that road, and continues making forward progress is manifesting self-control, moderation, and temperance. By contrast, one who is subject to excesses is constantly weaving from side to side, falling into ditches, taking turns onto divergent paths, and never able to make real progress toward the stated goal. God uses this analogy of travel very often, and it is a good basis for understanding how temperance is manifested.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13–14).

Jesus Christ compared our journey as Christians to walking a narrow, troublous path, requiring much effort to make it to the only correct end. He said very few are able to really stay that course with requisite self-discipline. That is also why this same One commanded ancient Israel to walk that narrow path without turning to the right hand or to the left hand. The image is of one who has both feet planted firmly on the right path, moving with confidence and control, one step forward at a time—straight ahead—unwavering, and undeterred by obstacles and threats emerging on either side. It denotes one who is focused, and is not subject to distraction. It is only someone with a balanced orientation of mind—one who is mentally *contained*—who can complete such a difficult journey.

## **Man Has No Natural Balance**

Man cannot manifest such balance and perspective in guiding his own journey through life. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Again, the analogy of traveling toward a destination is used to emphasize man's natural inadequacies. Most human beings do not know they have a defective "compass" in their heads. They have absolute confidence in the power of their own minds, and trust the thoughts that come to them inherently, unaware that they are depending upon a faulty instrument. The fruit of man's own ways over the last six thousand years is a testament to that mental defect, but it does not stop every new generation from believing it is the one which will finally change the historical outcome through man's implicit wisdom. But in spite of setting goals to bring about peace, prosperity, happiness, and success, man is ever propelled away from those results by the pull of lustful impulses which drives him to forsake humanitarian platitudes for the immediacy of self-gratification.

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts (James 4:1–3).

This endless cycle of human futility is comparable to a man seeking a very noble goal which he can see miles away in the distance, but unable to discover the singular path that will lead him there. With all of his effort he tries one path after another—teaching others to follow him as he goes—yet invariably ending up farther away from his destination than when he began. "And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?" (Luke 6:39). God made man spiritually blind. He will never overcome that defect of his own accord.

## **God's Children Offered Direction**

Unlike the mass of humanity vainly seeking the right path, those God calls out of this world are offered knowledge of that singular path which leads to human salvation, and the miraculous power to help them walk it successfully. Armed with God's Holy Spirit, those baptized into the Body of Christ have every right and opportunity to traverse that narrow and troublous path which leads to life eternal. The only question becomes whether they will be able to stay the course for the long-haul, or will they allow something along the way to turn their heads, pulling them to the left hand or to the right hand. "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). One who plows must be steady and consistent, gauging his progress along a straight path, and focusing on his work without distraction. The one who begins to grow weary or allow his mind

to wander to other things will soon find his rows crooked. So too, a man who sets out on a long journey will require stamina and perseverance to reach his goal. He must have a convicted, settled, temperate orientation of mind to make it all the way to the end.

One who responds to God's calling and begins to walk down that road to salvation is subject to many obstacles along the way. The one who does not have his mental orientation grounded and balanced will eventually fall into a ditch, be pulled off onto a tangent path, or simply get discouraged and turn around and head back where he began. A lack of godly temperance often can be instrumental in these spiritual miscues. Let us consider some examples of these pitfalls and see how simple moderation and balance—temperance—can be so critical.

### **Beware of the Ditches**

If God's true Way of Life is like a narrow path, it requires we walk in the middle of that path and avoid drifting to one side or the other, or else we take the chance of falling into a ditch. The fact God admonishes us to avoid turning to the right hand or to the left hand, means we must be cognizant of threats on *both* sides, not just one. If we focus exclusively on the left-hand ditch—walking too far to the right—we will likely fall inadvertently into that right-hand ditch. The same thing will happen if we focus exclusively on the right and lose sight of the threat to the left. But how has this concept been manifested in the church among God's people in the past, and how does it affect us today?

As carnal human beings, every one of us is prone naturally either to water down God's laws, or to try and add to them (perhaps some of each). God condemns either tendency:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18–19).

That warning applies to subtracting from or adding to anything God recorded and preserved for His Church in the Holy Scripture. And because Jesus Christ is that very Word personified, it means the principles taught in that Scripture are to be applied as Christ reveals Himself through His chosen servants, not as any man chooses to amend them through human interpretation. Many human beings seek to "take away" from God's commands by advocating license to indulge carnal lusts. These are ones who might be called "liberal," wanting to make the road to salvation easier than God ordained it. But there are likewise those who seek to increase their seeming righteousness by "adding to" God's commands. This is what the first century Jews were doing, which caused Jesus to denounce them strongly.

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi (Matthew 23:4–7).

These are among those who are certainly zealous for God, but by departing from the standard God gave, have become just as guilty as the "liberals" by adding burdensome commands God never intended (Mark 2:24–28). This orientation was common among the Pharisees, but for this analysis, we will simply refer to this group as the "super-righteous."

What does this all have to do with temperance and our analogous walk down God's narrow path? Many called into God's church in previous decades have become guilty of falling into spiritual ditches: the "liberals" into the left ditch and the "super-righteous" into the right ditch. Those seeking to walk as close to the edge of God's law as they can—doing only what is minimally required and getting as close to "the world" as possible—invariably end up in the left-hand ditch. Because they lack a balanced—temperate—approach to obedience and view God's law as a burden, they end up off course and in great spiritual distress. But the "super-righteous" fare no better in the end. Because they too refuse to stay to the middle of the path, and seek by knee-jerk reaction to distance themselves from any appearance of liberalism, they often end up in an equally distressing state, spiritually crippled in the right-hand ditch. In the end, God wants neither liberals nor super-righteous. Those are all human proclivities—part of that carnal nature we are commanded to root out! God wants His people to have spiritual balance—temperance.

Please do not confuse the concept of balance and temperance with compromise. We are not talking about charting a course between liberal and conservative views with a mixture of both to appease dissenting camps. We are talking about God's perfect law as the *only acceptable standard*, and compromising neither to the left nor the right for the sake of *any* special-interest group. Temperance does not denote compromise. It is God's revealed way that marks the center of the course which we must find and maintain.

### **Liberal and Super-righteous Traits**

Satan cares not into which ditch you or I may be prone to fall. He is ever willing to appeal to our particular leanings and encourage us to drive full-bore into the ravine, whether to the left or to the right. How many times have serious accidents occurred when a car driver overcorrected to avoid a hazard on one side of the road, only to collide with an unseen hazard on the other side? Those who cannot keep from straying away from the "trunk of the tree" as Mr. Herbert Armstrong called it—either to the left or to the right—are asking for trouble. How many of our

former brethren have we witnessed make such terrible mistakes in years past? We have seen many come and go.

First, we have seen those who could never shake their mesmerization with the world justify their carnal lusts by gradually watering down God's commands. For example, such was the case with many who had marriage troubles or who were divorced. They were either unwilling to stay with their true mates and work out the problems, unwilling to remain alone and celibate (having mates now unwilling to live with them), or they were unwilling to admit the ones they had since remarried were not legitimate spouses and then to separate from those adulterous situations. Rather than face the hard reality of God's immutable requirement to honor a binding marriage vow, they sought instead to reinterpret God's expectations to allow them to do what their carnal lusts demanded. Others have had great difficulty with keeping the Sabbath and Holy Days properly. Attending commanded assemblies and making proper preparation and sacrifice to be at God's Feasts always seemed to be a struggle. Eventually, they simply stopped fighting and drifted away from the church altogether. Some others became enamored with the world's false concept of love, being lured into believing we do not need to be concerned about doctrine, but simply to "love each other" and "do good works." These are just a few of many traps which have ensnared those leaning to the liberal left.

But secondly, how many very zealous members of the church have we seen become offended in time and end up leaving the church, just like the liberals? There have been those who could talk eloquently about God and His Truth and certainly behave on the exterior as though they were close to God. But when that zeal was not *tempered* with spiritual balance, many of them were easily led by Satan onto a tangent path and ended up spiritually devastated. While they were seeking to lead us by their "glowing examples" as the "strong ones" in the body, they ended up stumbling and cutting themselves off from their very lifeline—the Holy Spirit. What were some of the common traps for those prone to be super-righteous? Some came to believe they were inspired directly by God with special knowledge or gifts which "ordained" them to serve the church in a special capacity, even in opposition to the ministry. Others became conceited in their technical scholarly abilities or personal studies—especially emphasizing their "senior status" from years in the church—and began to contend with the ministry on things they felt should be taught or emphasized. If the ministry did not accept their "wise counsel," they became offended in time and separated from the body. Still some were focused on the sins of others, and becoming grieved when too many others were not as righteous as they were (or growing as much as they thought they should) concluded we must not truly be a faithful remnant after all. These are merely a *few* examples of potential traps for those who have untempered zeal.

But by comparison to the liberals and the super-righteous, who are the ones who have endured thus far, for many decades, and manifested real fruits of sound spiritual minds? It is those who have never forgotten that their number one responsibility is crucifying the self, and have never wearied of making more room for the mind of Jesus Christ to dwell within them. It

is those who refuse to justify sin in order to make God's way seem easier. It is those who likewise avoid spiritual "fads," and shrink from making ostentatious shows to convince others of their "spiritual maturity." It is those who resist trying to prove anything to anyone else—in or out of the church—and simply and quietly apply themselves to the work of humble Christian endeavor. It is the ones who eschew positions of prominence or glory and choose instead to quietly serve behind the scenes. It is those who do not crave a "special" spiritual calling, and are simply thrilled that God has called them to be a member of the Body of Christ. It is these who have stayed the course so far, and have weathered the comings and goings of many others who just could never get their spiritual feet down. Brethren, we are talking about ones who have shown consistency, balance, moderation, and self-control. It is this temperance—a critical fruit of God's Holy Spirit—which has acted like a rudder to prevent wild and volatile swings along the spiritual trek. It is that *balance of mind* which provides the ability to track right down the center of the path—as God admonishes us—and avoid turning to the right hand or to the left hand. "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand" (Philippians 4:5).

### **The True Ministry Manifests Temperance**

It is not only the laity that requires temperance. The faithful ministry of Jesus Christ—representing that Christ as messengers of the Truth—will likewise be manifesting temperance, if the Holy Spirit is truly inspiring.

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, *temperate*; (Titus 1:7–8) [emphasis mine].

And what is one of the key ways to know whether a minister is really acting with temperance? The continuation of Paul's admonition to Titus in verse nine tells us:

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers (Titus 1:9).

A minister being led through the Holy Spirit will be showing temperance by avoiding any shifts in doctrinal teaching, holding to the center of that path as God has previously revealed and continues to lead. You will not see sudden shifts in direction or inspiration. No claims of "new revelation" which takes the church into strange philosophical territory. No proclivity to water down God's commandments to make it easier to accommodate a short-run crisis for himself or another member. No preoccupation with trying to identify or elevate his personal identity in God's plan through contorted assumptions about Biblical prophecies of the last days. No mesmerization with identifying "new truth" to satiate carnal appetites for something more

titillating. A minister manifesting true temperance will be reflecting the solidarity and trustworthiness of God's unchanging doctrines in all that he proclaims from the pulpit and all that he counsels in private. If he truly is an authorized instrument of Jesus Christ, although he is still fighting weaknesses of the flesh as are all members of the Body, his orientation to God's Word will be consistent and steady. It will be *temperate*.

Over the last twenty-eight years of this remnant body's existence, there have been a number who have come and gone, choosing to depart because they ultimately challenged the premise of the faith once delivered. As Pastor and Director of Church of God, The Eternal from 1975 until his death in 2001, Mr. Raymond Cole was challenged a number of times by ones who thought we should do things differently. It is interesting that Mr. Cole was accused by some of being too stern in his preaching of God's requirements (those who were liberally-minded), and at the very same time he was accused of being too liberal by those who argued for additional regulations and expectations (the super-righteous). To hear some talk you would think he was a raging tyrant, ruling the church with an iron fist and lacking in love and compassion for the brethren. At the very same time, to hear certain others talk you would get the impression he was so weak and liberal, he was giving in to all forms of compromise just to make people happy. But the real truth is, Raymond Cole was not willing to compromise his convictions in those doctrines—*which he had learned personally* at the feet of Mr. Herbert Armstrong—*for anyone*. He was not willing to compromise them toward the left, and neither was he willing to compromise them toward the right.

It is often said a referee criticized as being partial by *both* competing teams is probably making calls in a balanced fashion. Likewise, a minister accused by extremists on both the left and the right is also probably being very balanced and temperate. To *temper* means to regulate, to restrain, to mollify, and to bring a substance to a suitable state. It is the requirement of every Christian to temper his character through the Holy Spirit, and it is the responsibility of every true minister of Jesus Christ to temper his leadership with wisdom, prudence, and fearless conviction. It is this kind of temperance which acts to eliminate knee-jerk movements in doctrinal teaching and administrative policy. A temperate minister will often be very predictable, because his behavior and basis for decision-making is consistent over time. It is an orientation perfectly described as turning neither to the left hand nor to the right hand. Any converse pressure from within or without is *tempered* to maintain course and counter the effects of carnal human demands.

### **We Will Stay the Course**

This continuing ministry is likewise intent on staying that course, and preventing any attempt to redirect our spiritual journey toward Christ's Kingdom into a crooked—untempered—endeavor. We intend to hold fast to the very doctrines and

administrative practices which have been blessed for so many years by God. "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14). Even as Mr. Raymond Cole was often confronted, and resisted those pressures (some more subtle than others) to shift either to the left or the right, with God's continued help that is precisely what we will continue to do.

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed (Hebrews 12:12–13).

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) (Hebrews 10:23).

The path which God has set His people upon is a very difficult way. It requires much determination to make necessary changes in our lives which God will require before granting us glory in His eternal Kingdom. We must be resolute and focused to avoid making any wrong turns along the way. Our natural minds lack the ability to walk consistently under such intense pressure. By ourselves alone, we are all plagued with defective minds, unable by nature to chart a sound course. With all that God permits to confront us in trials and persecutions, it would be impossible for us to produce anything but a crooked path in absence of His Holy Spirit.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:2–8).

Continuing to drift into extremism after having been given access to God's temperate Spirit is a dangerous proposition. Do we see that natural proclivity in our own personal thinking? Or might we still be interpreting our *carnal* leanings as God's revelation "through me"? Satan is ever so clever at disguising his inspiration to make it appear that it is coming from God. Those who seek to teach the ministry—either seeking more liberalization or conservatism—are all playing a very dangerous game. This lack of temperance will eventually destroy the one who cannot get hold of himself/herself and find a proper balance. It has done so many times in the past, and those same tests will still be very much at play in these times leading to the return of Christ.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it (Amos 8:11–12).

We do not have to be among those apostate children of God yet running to and fro, leaving untempered, crooked footprints as their legacy. God has offered us a better alternative:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:14–15).

Those who use the Holy Spirit to put on temperance—along with all of the other fruits of God's character—can have absolute confidence in times of trial, and still hold a straight and confident line no matter what. Those who successfully learn to wield that Spirit will be given significant offices in Christ's new government upon this earth. They will then be teaching the nations those very same principles of self-control, consistency, and temperance:

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left (Isaiah 30:20–21).

May you all be prospered in that rewarding journey which leads to life eternal, and be examples of absolute continuity no matter what lies ahead as that time grows nearer.

Your devoted servant in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby