

# “TEMPERANCE”

## The Ninth Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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Remember "the fruit of the Spirit" is the singular fruit produced by living according to the Spirit's inspired instructions – the Bible. This singular fruit is characterized by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These are not separate or different fruits but are varying qualities of the same fruit. The ninth and final quality of "the fruit of the Spirit" found in Galatians 5 is "temperance."

"Temperance" is self-control. In the original language, it literally means "in strength," that is, in the realm or in the sphere of strength. It describes the virtue of a person who masters his or her desires and passions.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul describes the temperance a person must have in order to win a race. Listen to the words of Paul. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 he writes,

"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."

Truly Christians are in a race, and God intends for us to be winners. In order to win, we must have temperance. Notice some lessons on temperance from this text.

First, Christians must run to win. Paul wrote, "So run, that ye may obtain." This is a winning attitude or disposition of mind. Attitude often determines the difference between winning and losing. An "I can't" attitude never could. Here is the point: Christians need to be in control of their thoughts in order to obtain an incorruptible crown. Wise Solomon wrote, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). Everything a person does goes back to a heart action (cf. Matthew 15:17-19). If a person controls his heart, the way he thinks, then he will also be in control of his body. For this reason, we can see why David wrote a man is blessed when "his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he

meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:2). And why Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

In Philippians 4:8, Paul gave a prescription for good mental health. He wrote,

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." In order to think about such things, a person must control his thoughts. We must not allow ourselves to think about falsehoods, dishonorable things, unrighteousness, impurity, things associated with hatred, and wicked reports. If we will allow such thoughts, they could consume our lives and make us bitter. But if we think about things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, we will have "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

A part of disciplining one's mind is knowing the mark and staying focused upon it. What are our desires in life? Is it material goods or is it heaven. If we desire the incorruptible crown, then heaven must be our goal. Now that we know the mark, then let us stay focused upon it. Rather than allowing ourselves to be distracted by the material/physical world, let us stay focused upon the heavenly reward. Rather than being a double minded man who is unstable in all his ways, let us fix our eyes upon the crown of life. Let us be like Moses who had respect unto the recompense of reward and chose Him who is invisible over the treasures of Egypt (Hebrews 11:23-27). Though men may try, but the fact remains "ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Therefore, discipline your mind and stay focused upon the heavenly reward.

Second, Christians must discipline their bodies and bring them into subjection in order to obtain an incorruptible crown (1 Corinthians 9:27). Rather than being a slave to the body, we must make our bodies servants for the Master. Our bodies were given to us to serve God. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:12,13). In order to accomplish this, we must deny ourselves, take up the cross of Christ, and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24). Obviously, this is not an easy task. In fact, to allow another to have control over us is against man's natural way of thinking, but if we desire to have life, we must bring our bodies into subjection.

A major part of buffeting our bodies is controlling our tongues. This is a major theme in the third chapter of James. He wrote that if a man is able to control this "unruly evil" (verse 8), the tongue, he "is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (verse 2). Solomon wrote, "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles" (Proverbs 21:23). It almost goes without saying that many of us have brought upon ourselves a wide variety of problems because we did not "bite our tongues."

Not only is "temperance" a quality of "the fruit of the Spirit," it is also listed among the qualities of fruitfulness in 2 Peter 1. These qualities are built one upon another. Peter begins with faith. Faith is the most fundamental, and we build upon faith with virtue, upon virtue with knowledge, then with temperance, then patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and upon brotherly kindness with love (verses 5-7). Since they build one upon another, then we can understand more about any one of these qualities by the preceding and succeeding qualities. Since temperance is built upon knowledge, then something must be learned before a person can be temperate, and temperance is putting into practice what we have already learned. Furthermore, patience (endurance) results from temperance. Only until we learn temperance, will we learn true patience.

When Paul taught Felix concerning faith in Christ, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). Notice temperance came after righteousness and judgment after temperance. Righteousness is God's gift to mankind. Through the blood of Christ and our obedience to the gospel, we are justified and made righteous. Temperance is man's response to the righteousness of God. It is self-control in remaining or abiding in righteous living. Judgment is bringing into accountability righteousness and temperance. How did we respond to the righteousness of God? Did we live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? Our acceptance of the righteousness of God and our temperate abiding in righteousness will be brought into accountability (judgment).

By controlling our minds and bodies, we will be temperate in all things and will obtain that incorruptible crown. The incorruptible crown is a victory crown that will not decay nor perish. It will last forever! Therefore, "let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).