Scriptures on Temperance

A. Temperance as Emotional Restraint or Self-Control

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly. Proverbs 14.29  ESV

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city. Proverbs 16.32  NIV

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1.19  NIV

Let your gentleness be evident to all. Philippians 4.5  NIV

Remind them . . .to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. Titus 3.1-2  EVS

B. Temperance as Moderation: Avoiding Excessiveness

Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags. Proverbs 23.20-21  ESV

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything. 1 Corinthians 6.12  ESV

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 1 Corinthians 9.25  ESV

Temperance and the other virtues

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control Galatians 5.22  ESV

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. 2 Peter 1.5-9  KJV
QUESTIONS for Discussion:

1. To what extent does our economy depend on the kind of conspicuous consumption that is the glutinous opposite of temperance? Likewise, how much does advertising revolve around intemperate appeals to the seven deadly sins? In light of these answers, how might Christians use the ideal of temperance to respond (both personally and corporately) to such a system?

2. Mark Twain wrote, “Temperate temperance is best, intemperate temperance injures the cause of temperance.” Senator Barry Goldwater (in)famously quipped that “Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.” In our personal and political lives, how can we distinguish between the things that we must zealously commit to, and those areas in which we should practice “temperance?”

3. In the novel Frankenstein, Mary Shelley provides us with perhaps the most notorious example of an intemperate academic. C.S. Lewis suggests, “A man who is eating or lying with his wife or preparing to go to sleep in humility, thankfulness and temperance, is, by Christian standards, in an infinitely higher state than one who is listening to Bach or reading Plato in a state of pride.” Finally, Horace Mann wrote, “If temperance prevails, then education can prevail; if temperance fails, then education must fail.” How should temperance inform God’s calling to be a student and scholar?

4. To convince you to buy its latest data plan, Sprint is currently airing a commercial that embodies the promises of modern technology by proclaiming you have a “Right to be Unlimited.” How might a return to the ancient virtue of temperance inform and improve a citizenry addicted to Facebook, texting, 24-hour news, and free refills?

CLOSING PRAYERS

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
Where there is hatred…let me sow love. Where there is injury…pardon. Where there is discord…unity. Where there is doubt…faith. Where there is error…truth. Where there is despair…hope. Where there is sadness…joy. Where there is darkness…light.

Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek: To be consoled…as to console. To be understood…as to understand. To be loved…as to love.

For:
It is in giving…that we receive. It is in pardoning…that we are pardoned. It is in dying … that we are born to eternal life.

(Prayer of St. Francis)

O Lord our God, teach us temperance and self-control, that we may live in the Spirit. Teach us gentleness and courtesy. Remove from us all grasping, excessiveness, covetousness, and gluttony, that we may not be enslaved by anything, but live godly lives—lives that are not barren, but fruitful, and zealous for your glory; through Christ Our Lord, AMEN
We have all become aware lately of something very disquieting about what we call our economic system. An odd change has come over us since the arrival of the machine age. Whereas formerly it was considered a virtue to be thrifty and content with one’s lot, it is now considered to be the mark of a progressive nation that it is filled with hustling, go-getting citizens, intent on raising their standard of living. And this is not interpreted to mean merely that a decent sufficiency of food, clothes, and shelter is attainable by all citizens. It means much more and much less than this. It means that every citizen is encouraged to consider more, and more complicated luxuries necessary to his well-being. The gluttonous consumption of manufactured goods . . . [is considered] the prime civic virtue. And why? Because the machines can produce cheaply only if they produce in vast quantities; because unless the machines can produce cheaply nobody can afford to keep them running; and because, unless they are kept running, millions of citizens will be thrown out of employment, and the community will starve.

We need not stop now to go round and round the vicious circle of production and consumption. We need not remind ourselves of the furious barrage of advertisement by which people are flattered and frightened out of a reasonable contentment into a greedy hankering after goods which they do not really need; nor point out for the thousandth time how every evil passion—snobbery, laziness, vanity, concupiscence, ignorance, greed—is appealed to in these campaigns. . . . As the necessity to sell goods in quantity becomes more desperate the people’s appreciation of quality is violently discouraged and suppressed. [We are encouraged to] not buy goods that last too long, for production cannot be kept going unless the goods wear out, or fall out of fashion, and so can be thrown away and replaced with others. If a man invents anything that would give lasting satisfaction, his invention must be bought up by the manufacturer so that it may never see the light of day. Nor must the worker be encouraged to take too much interest in the thing he makes; if he did, he might desire to make it as well as it can be made, and that would not pay. It is better that he should work in a soulless indifference, even though such treatment should break his spirit, and cause him to hate his work. . . .

The point I want to make now is this: that whether or not it is desirable to keep up this fearful whirligig of industrial finance based on gluttonous consumption, it could not be kept up for a single moment without the co-operative gluttony of the consumer. . . . The whole system would come crashing down in a day if every consumer were voluntarily to restrict his purchases to the things he really needed. . . .

[The huge divide between the richer and the poorer classes will continue] so long as the poor admire the rich for the indulgence in precisely that gluttonous way of living which rivets on the world the chain of the present economic system, and do their best to imitate rich men’s worst vices. To do that is to play into the hands of those whose interest it is to keep the system going.

[At this present war-time period] we are having to learn, painfully, to save food and material and to salvage waste products; and in learning to do these things we have found a curious and stimulating sense of adventure. For it is the great curse of Gluttony that it ends by destroying all sense of the precious, the unique, the irreplaceable. But what will happen to us when the war-machine ceases to consume our surplus products for us? Shall we hold fast to our rediscovered sense of real values and our
adventurous attitudes of life? If so, we shall revolutionize world economy without any political revolution. Or shall we again allow our Gluttony to become the instrument of an economic system that is satisfactory to nobody? That system as we know it thrives upon waste and rubbish-heaps. At present the waste (that is, sheer gluttonous consumption) is being done for us in the field of war. In peace, if we do not revise our ideas, we shall ourselves become its instruments. The rubbish-heap will again be piled on our own doorsteps, on our own backs, in our own bellies. Instead of the wasteful consumption of trucks and tanks, metal and explosives, we shall have back the wasteful consumption of wireless sets and silk stockings, drugs and paper, cheap pottery and cosmetics—all the slop and swill that pour down the sewers over which the palace of Gluttony is built.