

2013: TIME TO CHOOSE

February 10 (Mardi Gras): Temperance: Self Surrendered Fully (Matthew 26:36-46; Romans 12:1-2)

Intro: We have discussed prudence, courage and justice. The final of the four virtues for our study is temperance. Temperance is the practice of self-control, abstention, and moderation. Any person can practice this virtue. Temperance is mostly about tempering the appetites that humans have.

Before I see you again it will be Lent. Lent has been set aside by Christians for hundreds of years as a time for spiritual contemplation and discipline. I hope that you will look at your life and identify any excess, any area that needs discipline. It could be your entertainment, eating and drinking, or your spiritual walk. Between now and Easter make it your goal to achieve greater consistency and Christlikeness in that area. Do it because you are devoted to God with all your heart. Jesus shows us that temperance includes a total abandonment of self-centeredness. It means giving yourself entirely to that which is loved.

***I saw an explosion of human emotion, an out-of-control rage, at the sight of Gethsemane the first time I was in Israel. Our Jewish guide and an Arab caretaker got into a heated argument. It was the only time on that trip that I was uncomfortable.

This demonstration of volatility took place right at the garden gates where Jesus prayed in agony on the night he was betrayed.

Followers of Jesus get to temperance in a different way than most people. We do not depend simply on the power of the will. For us, temperance is part of the practice of the Lordship of Christ in our lives. It is about the full surrender of self to God.

We believe that temperance is part of the fruit of the Spirit, that a person who is full of God will practice temperance as an outgrowth of their relationship with God.

We find this dramatically demonstrated in the Garden of Gethsemane right before Jesus is crucified and right after he eats the Last Supper with his disciples. Sandwiched into these evening hours is a prayer vigil under the olive trees in the Kidron Valley.

I find here an astonishing resolve, devotion, and surrender—and an example that I long to follow. Note three steps to Self-Control:

I. Intimate Friendship: *My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me* (Matt 26:38).

A. Jesus had the crowds. They loved him and thronged him. But John tells us that Jesus did not entrust himself to the crowds because he knew what was in them (John 2:24-25).

B. Jesus had the Twelve that he longed to eat the Last Supper with. They were not only his disciples. They were his friends. In fact, he called them his friends at a very significant moment in his ministry. “I do not call you servants but friends” (John 15:15).

C. Jesus had the three, Peter, James, and John, with whom he shared the true condition of his soul.

1. He took only these three disciples into the room where the gathered crowd laughed him to scorn, and he raised from the dead the little girl (Mark 5:37).

2. He took them along with him when his glory was about to be revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-4).

3. He took them with him in trouble and sorrow.

D. Begin your Temperance with Friendship.

1. Make this your first discipline. Do you have three friends? You need them now. This will cost you time and some independence. It will cost you anonymity. Maybe right now you feel as though you are flying under the radar in all respects. Of course, that is not true. This will require of you a transparency that at times may be uncomfortable.

***This event in the Garden is still uncomfortable for the friends of Jesus. “He had no tears for his own grief, but sweat drops of blood for mine.” I grew up singing these words. But are they true? Did he not weep for his own circumstance as well as for the trouble of the world? We are uncomfortable with the humanity of Jesus. The church has always squirmed at Gethsemane.

II. Honest Prayer: *My Father, if it possible, may this cup be taken from me* (Matthew 26:39).

A. There is no use in pretending to talk to God if you are not going to be honest.

1. Honesty in prayer is not automatic, especially if we are praying out loud where we can hear our own words.

2. We must tell things to God that no one else knows and that we are afraid and ashamed to admit even to ourselves.

B. Temperance is about total abandonment in prayer. Here we abandon our protective defenses. We lay down our arms. We approach the throne of grace as penitent sinners in deep need.

C. If Gethsemane is about anything, it is about prayer. Even if you have donned the FULL ARMOR OF GOD, you must still **PRAY IN THE SPIRIT ON ALL OCCASIONS** (Ephesians 6:18).

***Our prayer warrior, John, pointed out to me that last week I failed to mention prayer as part of the exercise of justice in the life of the believer. He was right to identify this omission. We cannot follow Jesus Christ faithfully and be prayerless.

D. Jesus addressed God as “My Father.” This is how he taught us to pray: “Our Father.”

1. There is tremendous strength in this intimate name for God. It is empowering to us in our moment of weakness to acknowledge and remember the Fatherhood of God for us.

2. The Father always gives good gifts to his children. Jesus taught us this. If we ask for a fish he will not give us a serpent. If we ask for bread he will not give us a stone.

3. So if we ask for what we need in the moment of our greatest temptation we can know that we have the inner resources fully available to us to prevail in that hour.

E. It is ALWAYS TIME TO PRAY. We ought always to pray, as the Scripture instructs us. But it is especially necessary to pray at the moment of our decision, in the stresses and fears when we stand at the Crossroads. Jesus prayed here as should we.

III. Full Surrender: *Yet not as I will, but as you will* (Matt 26:39).

A. Jesus conformed his will to the will of the Father. “Be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

1. We see here the prayer that our Savior prayed on the eve of his greatest Temptation. He was tempted throughout his ministry to take another path to victory, to be someone other than the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world.

2. The Temptation in the Wilderness was just about this. Be the Bread King. Be the Amazing Miracle-Worker. Fall down and worship me, and you can have it all.

3. Peter’s remonstrance on the Road to Caesarea Philippi was all about this. Jesus said that he was going to suffer and die, and Peter could not accept it. Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan” to Peter because this was the strategy of Satan throughout the ministry of Jesus—tempting him to choose another path.

4. Jesus had a will that he consistently conformed to the will of the Father. What the Father did, that is what Jesus did. He did what he saw the Father doing. He said what he heard the Father saying. He did not do or speak on his own. It was always the Father whose lead he was following.

B. You, too, are tempted to take another course, to be somebody else. Devotion to Christ seems narrow on some days. The gate seems narrow and the way seems narrow. You see your life wholly swallowed up in following the Savior, and you question whether this is really what you want. In this temptation you are experiencing a little of what happened at Gethsemane.

C. Temperance requires, not a moderate commitment to Christ, but a radical devotion and resolve. Nothing so protects your heart from the excesses of the flesh as an unyielding devotion to Christ.

IV. Immediate Obedience: *Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!*” (Matt 26:46).

A. Jesus did not bolt in the Garden. He could have gone any number of ways out of that place. But he went to meet his betrayer.

1. Jesus proved what the perfect will of God was by obeying God at the most difficult point in his life.

2. Picture the ranks of angels, standing at attention, stretching from the throne of God as far as the eye could see. These are the legions of warriors that stood ready to obey the command of Jesus if he called for them. Had Jesus refused this course and called down the angels, as they tempted him to do when he hung upon the cross, then each of us sinners would die in his sins.

3. Jesus surrendered to the mob. He let Judas kiss him. He stretched out his arms on the cross and died.

B. This is a true and faithful picture of Self-Control. Here is all the motivation you will need for a lifetime of surrender to the Father’s will.

C. Do not delay your obedience. All you gain is more sin for which to grieve and repent. And every delay causes you to lose another day when you could be pleasing the Father.

D. Self-control brings us to the very pinpoint of our need and the very center of our resistance. Will you follow Christ, or will you break away from his Lordship and follow your own devices?

Conclusion: