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## **ABSTINENCE FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS.**

– 1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-33. – NOVEMBER 26. –

**Golden Text:** – "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." – 1 Cor. 10:12.

BY COMMON consent this date is recognized as Temperance Sunday throughout the civilized world. No true child of God could feel indifferent in respect to a matter of such vital importance to our race. Undoubtedly the drinking habit is a cause of much of the woe of the world, and hence whoever is on the Lord's side, whoever is striving as one of the Royal Priesthood to remember the injunction, "Be clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord's house," must feel his responsibility to this question in respect to his own person and the example of his daily life upon others. Whoever realizes that the whole creation is groaning and travailing in pain together and longs for the time to come when he may, in association with his Redeemer, roll back from the world the weaknesses of heredity and bind Satan and estop the course of sin and temptation, such an one, truly, heartily and sympathetically entering into these hopes set before us in the Gospel, will surely be in sympathy with every reasonable and legitimate means used in opposition to the great drink evil, which, as a brood of fiery serpents, is biting the world of mankind and causing all kinds of trouble, mental, moral and physical.

Were there no more important work for the saints to do undoubtedly it would be the will of the Lord that we should engage our talents largely in combating this terrible drink evil. But while seeing still more important work for the Lord's ambassadors to engage in, it is eminently proper that we should let it be known on suitable occasions that our sympathies are with those who are fighting in a legitimate manner this hideous monster, and that our non-participation is not from lack [R3665 : page 347] of sympathy with the cause, but because, from our standpoint of view, there is a

still greater, still grander and still more important work to be done in the proclamation of the good tidings of reconciliation to those who have an ear to hear our message now and ultimately to all the families of the earth. We trust that every one who has by the grace of God learned of Present Truth, and whose conceptions of divine mercy have been enlarged through a grander view of the divine plan, feels an increasing opposition to everything and every influence working in the world contrary to righteousness, purity, truth, and tending to further degrade our sadly fallen race. The clearer our view of the divine plan the more intense should be our feeling of opposition to everything sinful and contrary to that plan. The more we appreciate our God and are consecrated to his cause, the more we must be opposed to the adversary of souls and opposed to everything which is injurious to our fellows.

### **THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY.**

We are glad that those entrusted with the arrangement of these International Bible Lessons have chosen an apostolic exhortation which is applicable to temperance in every proper sense of the word. It is applicable not only to food and drink and clothing, but to every interest and affair of life; even as the Lord's people, consecrated to do his will, are exhorted that whether they eat or drink or whatever they do all should be done to the glory of the Lord. We have the declaration that no drunkard shall inherit the Kingdom of heaven, and we assume that intemperance on other lines would equally prove in the Lord's sight a lack of proper character on our part that would bar us from a share in the Kingdom, and that therefore with equal propriety we might say, No glutton shall enter the Kingdom of heaven. Neither those who devote their lives to fashion and folly, dress and frivolity.

The Lord is seeking for the Kingdom class persons of character, and has arranged that those who hear his message of grace in the present time and are accepted of him through consecration shall

sacrifice their own wills, the will of the flesh, to do the Lord's will, and therefore to no longer surrender themselves to gluttony or drunkenness or fashionable folly. The Lord is seeking those who surrender themselves to him to be taught in [R3666 : page 347] the school of Christ, to there learn the lessons of self-control, self-denial, patience, humility, meekness, and come to a proper appreciation of the various graces of the holy Spirit, and so far as possible to live in harmony with their noble conceptions and desires. These are the ones whom the Lord is seeking for the Kingdom, and we may feel sure that he will accept no others. He will find a sufficient number of this kind to complete his predestination, and it is for us, if we have heard his voice and been accepted of him, to strive daily to be dead to the world and to all fleshly desires that we may thus make our calling and election sure.

### **THE LAW GOVERNING SAINTS.**

The Apostle says that all things are lawful for him but all things are not expedient. There is a limited and unlimited way of using language. Evidently the Apostle has no thought of using this expression, "all things," unlimitedly. It would not have been lawful for him to murder or steal or do other things which he recognized to be contrary to the divine will. He is discussing the proper liberties of Christians. Their one law is supreme love for God and consequently a love for all mankind. This comprehensive law is binding upon them – it is the law of their being, to disregard which would mean the loss of the holy Spirit and, persevered in, would mean the second death. The Lord's children are not governed by "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," in respect to all the little affairs of life. It is left to them to apply the principles of this law of love to life's general affairs, including its trivialities. The Jews were under laws respecting various little details, and the Gentiles, the heathen, had their customs, usages, laws. The Christian stands free from all those, bound only by the one law of love. He may do anything that would not conflict with that law, but many things that would not so conflict might be inexpedient,

inadvisable, because of the mental and moral condition of those about him who might misunderstand his course.

In this lesson the Apostle is explaining a difficulty which perhaps more than any other trivial question was troublesome to the early Church. The Apostles at the Council in Jerusalem, answering the inquiry of the Church at Antioch, had declared that the Jewish law did not affect the Gentiles who had accepted Christ. Nevertheless they urged upon them amongst other things that they abstain from meats offered to idols. (Acts 21:25). This proved to be a very difficult matter with them because of the customs of that day. In Corinth, for instance, nearly all the meats sold in the butchers' stalls ("shambles") was meat which had been offered to idols. The people, not knowing the true God in exercising their faculty of veneration had come to suppose that all meats should be first offered to the heathen idols, in order that the partaking of them might have a blessing and be to their health. Meat of any other kind was scarce. The Apostle explains in our lesson that if Christians were invited to a feast by some of their unbelieving neighbors or friends or relatives, as for instance a marriage supper, they would in all probability sit down to meat which had been offered to an idol. They were in perplexity in respect to the matter what they should do: the Apostle was endeavoring to make plain to them the path of duty.

### **UNDER THE LAW OF LOVE.**

He sets forth, first of all, the basic rule that we who are Christians, we who are truly consecrated to the Lord, have given up our own wills and preferences in every matter with a view to honoring the Lord and doing all the good we can in the world in his name. He urges therefore, "Let no man seek his own but every man another's welfare." (v. 24.) The Apostle here would seem to mean that we are to be entirely regardless in respect to our own welfare that we may accomplish all the good possible for others; yet we believe that we would **[R3666 : page 348]** not be doing violence to

the general tenor of the Scriptures to suppose the Apostle means that we are not to seek our own welfare *merely*, but are to keep in view also the welfare, the interests of others, so that where these would conflict we would be ready to make any reasonable and proper sacrifice, especially on any matter or subject which would relate to the Lord and his Gospel message, because we are God's ambassadors and representatives of the Truth, his message, in the world.

In view of these things the Apostle advises that those who are advanced enough in the knowledge of the Truth to appreciate the fact that an idol is nothing, and that the offering of meat to that idol would in no degree affect it, might properly enough use their liberties and eat the meat, asking no questions, but remembering that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof;" and, accepting the food as being a part of the Lord's bounty, they may give thanks for it and eat it, regardless of where it has been, whether offered to an idol or not. But if some one should say to the believer, "That meat you are about to eat was offered to an idol," giving the inference that he believed it would be sin to partake of it, then our course should be different: not because our own conscience would smite us with the thought it was sin, nor with the thought that the meat had been injured by laying it before a piece of wood or stone, but for the conscience of the one telling us, lest he should think we were committing a sin, and lest he should be thus led to think lightly of our professions or to similarly partake, and that in violation of his own conscience – he thinking it to be sinful to eat such meat.

The Apostle Paul was thus in some degree stepping beyond the decree of the council at Jerusalem; but while standing up for all that the Jerusalem council had advocated, in so far as it would have any bearing or influence upon others, he nevertheless would recognize the liberty of the people of God, that they are under no law except love. He therefore is in this Scripture endeavoring to show wherein the law of love would have its restraining influence along lines of this question of eating meat offered to idols. The Golden Rule of love

would bid us be careful not to stumble the conscience of others, but otherwise it would not restrain us, for as the Apostle says, "Why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" (1 Cor. 10:29.) If it is not my own conscience which reproveth me why need I put myself under bondage in the matter if it will in no wise affect the interests or conscience of another? It is in harmony with the use of this liberty that the Apostle has just suggested that the one discerning his liberty may eat food respecting which he may have his suspicions that it was offered to an idol, and ask no questions about it, so that no one else's conscience may be involved; but if the conscience of another were involved the Golden Rule would immediately operate, and forbid us doing anything which would stumble or injure the conscience of a brother and break our good influence over him.

### **THE OTHER EXTREME.**

In a very few instances we have heard of people who endeavored to use the Apostle's argument here to restrain others from their reasonable liberties on various subjects. They put a false interpretation upon the Apostle's words, saying to the brother, "You ought not to do that because I do not want you to do it," or "The Apostle says that you ought not to stumble your brother, and you are stumbling me by not going to Church with me, as I wish you to do and as I think you ought to do."

This is a total mistake, a misapplication of the Apostle's teaching. It is an attempt to shackle and lead him as a slave, using the Apostle's words as a chain of slavery. If a Methodist brother should think that I ought to go with him to meeting on Sunday, a Presbyterian brother or a Lutheran brother or a Baptist or an Episcopalian or a Roman Catholic might each equally think that I should go to their services; yet none of these brothers could or would attempt to claim that the Lord had directed me to go to his particular services, nor could he claim that not to go with him would be a violation of any moral principle. The wrong in such a case would be

done by the one who would seek to bring the brother into bondage, and would use the Apostle's arguments in a sophistical manner contrary to their true import and contrary to the Golden Rule, for he would be doing to his neighbor contrary to what he would wish the neighbor to do to him – he would be attempting to reenslave his proper Christian liberties.

### **PARALLEL QUESTIONS TO-DAY.**

On the contrary, we have two matters in our day which closely parallel this difficulty in the Church in the Apostle's day, namely, the temperance question and the Sabbath question. The laws of civilized States usually provide for abstention from labor on one day of the week, and Christian people in general suppose that God has particularly required this of Christians – that it is a divine law, a bondage upon them. As we have already shown,\* this is an erroneous view; nevertheless Christians are glad of the opportunity to observe one day in seven for special worship and thankfulness and spiritual feasting. And seeing the general though erroneous view that believers have, it becomes not only our duty, but love makes it a pleasure and a privilege, to carefully abstain from any labors upon that day which the general sentiment of our neighbors would consider to be a violation of the sacredness of the day. Love for them and a desire not to encourage them to violate their consciences, not less than love for the Truth and a desire to have them appreciate the Gospel of which we are the ministers and ambassadors, should lead us to great carefulness on this matter.

\*MILLENNIAL DAWN, Vol. VI., Chap. VIII.

The liquor question occupies a similar position in the minds of many. True, there is nothing in the Word of God which prohibits his people from using all the liquors that would do them good, but the majority of the Lord's people are well aware that they would be better without any, and hence that to use liquors in any measure or degree would be to abuse their own persons, and to more or less incapacitate

themselves for the service of the Lord and to do good unto all men [R3667 : page 349] according to opportunity in his name. But even if we might use liquors *ad libitum* without injury, there would be under present conditions and sentiments strong reason why we should avoid every appearance of evil in respect to intoxicating liquors. We realize more and more what a curse it is to the world, and that our influence, if thrown on that side of the question, might ensnare others, who perhaps would be less strong to resist the encroachments and injuries from this demon. We can realize that under present conditions in this land it would be a reflection against us, against the message which we bear, against the Lord whom we represent, to have anything to do with the liquor traffic, or even to enter a liquor saloon on any other business, or to associate ourselves in any manner with so dire an evil, which even the unregenerate realizes to be an enemy to righteousness in every sense of the word. Some of the Lord's people, we feel, are not as particular as they should be in estimating the weight of their influence, and in determining that by the Lord's grace, as the Apostle urges, they will do nothing against the Truth, but will do all in their power for the Truth – for righteousness. – 2 Cor. 13:8.

### **THE BREADTH OF PAUL'S ARGUMENT.**

All must agree that the Apostle's argument is sound. On the one hand everything that we receive is a gift from the Lord, and anything that we can render him thanks for would be proper for us to use in a becoming manner, and none would have a right to condemn us for so doing. None should speak evil of us for doing a thing that we can do with good conscience and with prayer and thankfulness. On the other hand, however, while they have no right to criticize us, we have the right to judge our own conduct and to restrain ourselves, and to determine, as the Apostle elsewhere explains it, that if eating a certain kind of food would cause the stumbling of others, we would gladly agree never to use that kind of food. We are to see our liberties and to use them according to our judgment of the Lord's will, because



all things are given us richly to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17.) Eating or drinking, whatsoever we do, do all to the glory of God.

But whenever we see that anything in our lives, however right it may be of itself, would be a hindrance to the spread of the Lord's cause, a dishonor to the Truth in the sight of others, it is for us to sacrifice that thing, to deny ourselves that right, that liberty, that privilege, and give no occasion of stumbling either to Jew or Gentile or to the Church of God.

### **PAUL'S PERSONAL EXAMPLE.**

Blessed is every teacher who can write, as the Apostle does here (v. 33), that his own personal course known to the people of God is in full accord with the teachings he has set before them respecting self-denial for the good of others – "even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own advantage, but the good of the many, that they may be saved." What a noble character was St. Paul's! How willing to lay down his life for the brethren! yea, and in the hope of turning some from being aliens and strangers to make of them brethren through the message of the grace of God. Let us all more and more cultivate the Apostle's spirit and willingness to be and to do anything or everything that the Lord may be glorified and his cause advanced, and that his people and all people may be blessed. This is the spirit of Christ, the spirit of self-sacrifice, the spirit of love, the spirit of a sound mind to seek to do others good at any cost.

We are not to understand the Apostle here to mean that he succeeded in pleasing all men, for we know that he was stoned, beaten, and finally suffered death because he did not please all men; but he was loyal to the Lord, which loyalty meant the disapprobation of men. The Apostle's meaning evidently is that he sought, so far as loyalty to the Lord was concerned and loyalty to the principles of righteousness, to do or be everything for the advancement of the Gospel and the blessing of the people.

## **"HIM THAT THINKETH HE STANDETH."**

Our Golden Text appeals to us forcefully in connection with this lesson. The Lord's people are sometimes in danger through not realizing their own weaknesses. The Apostle said, "When I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12:10.) His paradox signifies that when he realized his own weakness, then through this realization he was led to rely upon the Lord and the power of his might, and thus was stronger than he could otherwise have been, strong in the Lord and not in his own strength. This principle is still applicable to us. The moment when we feel self-confident is the dangerous one; the times when we feel our own weakness and are looking to the Lord for grace and help and guidance and strength, this is the time that by reason of his assistance we are strong.

Let us take heed, then, lest we feel over-confident in respect to our own strength, our own standing on these questions of liberties, rights, privileges and self-denials for the good of others. It is right that we should think that we stand, but it is right that we continually appreciate that we stand not in our own strength but in the strength that God supplies through his promises and through his holy Spirit. We are frequently exhorted in the Scriptures not only to rejoice in the Lord and to trust in his power, but to fear and take heed lest we should in any measure slip away from or fail to rightly improve our positions and privileges. On a par with our Golden Text is the Apostle's statement, "Let us fear lest the promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it." (Heb. 4:1.) Love is the test to which all of the Lord's disciples are subject. Love considers the interests of others and seeketh not her own interests; love is willing to sacrifice for the good of others and for the glory of the Lord and for the advancement of his cause. Let love, therefore, abound in our hearts more and more.

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