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## **THE POWER OF THE WILL – SELF-CONTROL**

– *NOVEMBER 12.* – *ROMANS 14:13-15:3.* –

THE EVILS OF INTEMPERANCE – RESTRAINT OF LIBERTY FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS – A WORD OF WARNING IN REGARD TO PROPER INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE – SELF-DENIAL FOR CHRIST'S SAKE – FAITH VS. CONDEMNATION – APPLICATION OF THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE.

**"It is good not to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth." – Verse 21.**

AGAIN the International Sunday School Committee requests Christian people in general to consider the evils of intemperance and the importance of moderation in all things on the part of those professing godliness. Such lessons seem to be all the more important when we perceive that the rush, the push, the hurry, the consumption of nervous energy which characterize our day seem to be the cause of nervous and mental disorders and a lengthening of the lists of the insane.

Certainly no one claiming benevolence of heart and soundness of judgment could possibly advocate or encourage intemperance, realizing that it is a fruitful source of crime, depravity, immorality, etc. We note with pleasure the spread of local option and total prohibition in these United States and elsewhere – not that such restraints are the highest ideals of liberty, but that those who love liberty are willing to share the bondage of restraint for the sake of their fellow-citizens to whom full liberty is admittedly injurious.

Either climatic variations or else financial and social changes account for the fact that in the days of our Lord and the Apostles there was less tendency to drunkenness than there is now; and

probably for this reason the Scriptures have less to say respecting this vice, which is one of the chiefest evils of our day.

But no amount of interest in the temperance question should permit us to read into the Divine Word that which was not intended by its inspired writers, although we may properly enough draw inferences and conclusions. First of all, we must take the lesson provided for us as we find it. Today's Study is a part of the Apostle's discussion of law and liberty, custom and conscience, on questions that were prominent at the time of writing. With his accustomed vigor St. Paul is marking out the path of proper Christian conduct, in harmony with the second great commandment of the Divine Law – "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Although the lesson may be applied in a measure to every intelligent being, yet strictly, particularly, peculiarly, it applies to every consecrated member of the Church of Christ.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG WILL POWER**

All men have wills; and it is important that all should learn to use them. As a man willeth, so is he! The willless, the supine, are not truly men and women. To be a hero in the strife one must have a strong will; and in proportion to its correctness will be the influence and value of the personality. Children should not be trained to have no will, but, contrariwise, to have a will submitted to the proper rulers and guides of life – to parents, to earthly teachers and, later on, to the Divine will.

In our Study the Apostle is addressing those who submit their wills to the Lord – those who have accepted the Divine will as instead of their own. The noblest and best of the people of God are those who have iron wills, which they have fully submitted to the guidance and direction of the Lord – through the Bible, the Holy Spirit and Divine providences. "The Father seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Some are born with strong wills; others are naturally rather weak-minded. In the world the latter sink or swim, survive or perish, in the vicissitudes of life, often controlled by the law of supply and demand and the survival of the fittest. The inequalities of birth are frequently accentuated by life's experiences, and often disastrously. Some of the strong-willed become merchant princes, managers of large enterprises, etc.; others become thieves, desperadoes, etc. – the outcome depending largely upon haphazard circumstances.

The only safe course for any mariner on the stormy sea of life is to take on board the great Pilot, the Lord Jesus Christ. While He will probably seldom guide into a haven of earthly riches or earthly popularity, nevertheless He will, if permitted, bring us safely to the desired haven. Under this Pilot the human will is like a strong vessel with mighty sails or a powerful engine. The greater the power, the greater the capacity and the more useful. The proper Pilot will guide us not only safely past the rocks of disaster and the shoals of sin, but into the haven of life, joy, peace and fellowship Divine.

Not merely the strong-willed need this great Pilot. The weak-willed naturally need Him just as much; for although they might not run upon the rocks with the same degree of force, and thus make equally bad shipwreck, yet they are quite as likely to be caught upon the shoals of sin and, in a purposeless manner, fail to achieve in life anything worth while.

### **NEW CREATURES IN CHRIST JESUS**

Those who during this Gospel Age make a full surrender of their wills to the Lord and receive in return the begetting of the Holy Spirit are Scripturally termed New Creatures in Christ. (2 Cor. 5:17.) Their wills are brought into subjection to the will of God. The lessons of His Word and all the experiences of life under Divine provision are promised to work for their good – to strengthen their wills if too weak, to make them properly pliable if too rigid, and

eventually to make of them the most that is possible in the present life and to prepare them for the life to come.

Such are addressed by St. Paul in today's Study. They are exhorted not to judge the brethren in the sense of condemning them, but rather to judge themselves, criticize themselves, make of themselves shining lights, and thus to help the brethren by setting before them and the world a noble example. Sooner or later all must give an account to the Lord. Therefore our judging of others is unnecessary. Hence if we have judged or criticized each other in the past, we should avoid so doing in the future and should criticize only our ourselves – our words, our deeds, our thoughts – that nothing in us shall put a stumbling-block in the way of another.

The ceremonial cleanness or uncleanness of food is nothing to the Christian, who is free from all law except the Law of Love. But this Divine Law controls, and forbids us to stumble or even to grieve a brother less well-informed than ourselves. How could one who is controlled by love either eat, drink, act or speak in a manner that would cause injury to another? It is good to have liberty, but let us so use it as not to injure those less advanced than ourselves.

The Call of the Gospel Age is to joint-heirship with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom. Those who are thus called are not under the bondage of the Jewish Law, but have greater liberty in Christ. But shall we say that the advantage of our relationship to the Lord as prospective heirs of the Kingdom consists chiefly in the liberty to eat and to drink what we please? Surely not! These **[R5966 : page 299]** are but the lesser advantages of our blessed relationship to Christ and the Kingdom. Our chief blessing consists in our justification and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Let us appreciate these our chief blessings and privileges of the present time; for in so doing we shall be well pleasing in the sight of God, and men also will approve our conduct. So, then, let us follow after the things which make for peace, and the things

whereby we may build one another up. Let us not even risk injury to the Cause of Righteousness and the work of God's grace in others by using our liberties in any manner contrary to their welfare. Rather let us count it a privilege to void our rights, if thus we can glorify God and bless our fellow men.

## **FAITH VS. CONDEMNATION**

"The faith which thou hast, have thou to thyself before God." That is to say, our outward conduct need not necessarily show all the depth of our knowledge, faith and liberty. God knows the heart. He sees the progress which we have made; and He will be the better pleased with us if for the brethren's sake we do not declare all our liberties at a time and a place where the knowledge might prove injurious to others of His dear family.

The Apostle proceeds to point out that if we are critical in examining our own conduct and our own motives we may find therein something very similar in kind to that which we are disposed to criticize in others, although perhaps in relation to a different subject. (Verse 22.) For instance, whoever judges another allows, or concludes, that the other's conduct is inspired by pride, ambition, etc. If he were to turn his criticism upon himself, he might find something of the same kind in his own heart. Whoever concludes that his neighbor is a slanderer and condemns the neighbor for it should turn his criticism upon himself, to see that his own words are always above reproach – never upon the slanderer. Happy and blessed the person who after careful self-examination finds himself to be entirely free from faults he discerns in others. Such are exceptional characters.

With the wrong conception before the mind, the Apostle's words in Verse 23 sound extremely harsh. To many minds laboring under the delusions of the Dark Ages the idea is conveyed that whoever defiles his conscience by eating meat which he mistakenly thinks to be unclean would thus be sent to an eternity of torture. But

no such thought was in the Apostle's mind, nor could it be properly understood in his words. He there emphasizes the fact that any person eating meat, however clean, but thinking that in so doing he was committing a sin, would as a consequence be under condemnation for having violated his conscience, his judgment of the Lord's will; and that this condemnation of conscience would act as a barrier between himself and the Lord, who judges the heart and not merely the outward conduct. Such an alienation might ultimately lead to the loss of the great Prize of our High Calling, and thus lead one into the Great Company or possibly into the Second Death.

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE**

The Apostle explains why this condemnation would hold, saying, "because he eateth not of faith" – not in harmony with his conscience; and whatsoever is not in harmony with faith and conscience is a sin.

The application of this principle to the question of using or not using spirituous liquors would certainly be profitable to all of God's people. Whoever uses these liquors when he believes that their use is a sin is violating his conscience. Whoever uses them with full knowledge that another will thereby be affected unfavorably is violating the Law of Love – "Love thy neighbor as thyself." In our day this matter becomes more important than ever before, for today the question of conscience in the matter of using spirituous liquors is more pronounced than ever before.

In the Body of Christ the members have their various inherited weaknesses, against which they must wage a life-long warfare; and sometimes these weaknesses are of such a nature as to interfere to some extent with the rights and the comforts of others as well as those of their possessors. Along this line the Apostle offers a word of counsel, saying, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." Such patient,

forbearing love is one of the most beautiful adornments of Christian character.

This does not imply, however, that we should not expostulate with such a one, and endeavor to help him to get rid of his infirmity. This we should do in the spirit of meekness and kindness, while we cheerfully endure the trial of our patience, not seeking to please ourselves, but rather to help a weaker brother or sister. "Let every one of us," as the Apostle counsels, "please his neighbor for his good, to edification" – not by simply ignoring his fault as though we considered it of no consequence, but by humbly and patiently submitting to the discomfort, even while kindly urging him to strive against it.

If this spirit prevails, there need be no division in the Body of Christ; for all the members will have a mutual care and a mutual love for one another – a care which seeks to encourage all that is good and to discourage all that is unbecoming; a love which throws its mantle over the deformity, and which endeavors to conceal a fault rather than to expose the weaker brother to the reproach of others. Thus in the true Body of Christ, which is knit together in love, if one member suffer, all the members suffer with him in proportion as they are more or less directly associated with him; or if one member be honored, all the members rejoice with him and to some degree share the honor – just as when in an earthly family one member rises to honorable distinction all the members partake of the honor and the joy.

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