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## Word Games

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# WORD GAMES

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**Critics are saying *temperance* belongs to yesterday, but a long-time advocate calls it the “word for tomorrow.”**

**I**f you don't like the message, attack the words. Call them irrelevant, out of date, unimportant. Then give them another meaning.

This tactic has been employed with particular success against moral reformers, and of those, none more so than the temperance advocate.

The thrust may be sly: “This fellow is indeed full of his subject!” But the sly smiles subtly challenge the serious nature of intemperance. And gradually the reformer rather than the intemperance becomes the focus of contempt.

“Haven't we heard all that before?” is another telling tactic in an age when every tomorrow seems to bring a new and exciting challenge. It's especially effective when delivered with a yawn. And, truth is, the word *temperance* does belong to yes-

terdays; one need only turn to the Bible to find examples of intemperance from Genesis to Revelation. The world has heard all that before because history is full of besotted specimens of intemperance.

A look at these cases will, of course, broaden the concept of intemperance beyond use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, to excessive use of anything—even that which is good in itself (weight-lifting, turnips, sex, selling Bibles, watching television, shopping . . . ). The addictive drugs stand foremost in weakening the will, blotting out spiritual insights, and compromising both physical well-being and

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\* Ernest H. J. Steed was for many years “Mr. Temperance,” as head of the Temperance Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He is retired in DeBary, Florida.

social relations. But all intemperance—of whatever breed, tribe, or dilution, or definition—precipitates moral decay with consequent impact on such virtues as love, integrity, self-control, and even life itself.

It's in the Book.

Maybe, then, the problem lies with us and not the Word, which clearly—and at much greater length than this short article allows—defines not only temperance but intemperance as well. Further, the Book assigns the people of the Book to spread the word. Significantly, Jesus is called the living Word. And through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he lives in his people. They are indeed, to be “full” of the Subject! And then, to let it spill out!

#### A New Word Needed?

For more than 40 years, I served the Seventh-day Adventist Church as temperance director in the South Pacific Division and at the General Conference. I continue to hold office in temperance organizations and to lecture worldwide. I'm glad to tell you that Seventh-day Adventists are recognized everywhere as promoters of temperance. Surveys show that a high percentage link temperance with abstinence in the context of our church. Others use the term *moderation*, and that's not bad, for early in our history we were on record with this definition: “True temperance teaches us to abstain entirely from

that which is injurious, and to use judiciously only healthful and nutritious articles of food” (*Health Reformer*, April 1, 1877).

*Temperance*, as a word, is well recognized in society through years of education and witness. And our church has had a major role in that education. But the years have rolled by, along with a millennium. Should we then look for a new word?

Enemies of temperance would love that! They're the ones, as I said, who are attacking the word, declaring it irrelevant, out of date. Would they be doing that if it didn't still have clout? If it didn't hurt when it hits home?

#### An Awesome Witness

Scripture declares temperance to be a virtue that accompanies the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22, 23). If you get the Holy Spirit, you get temperance. If you testify for temperance, you're testifying for the Holy Spirit, and that is an awesome witness indeed!

Paul, who testified with that awareness, allied temperance with righteousness and judgment (see Acts 24, 25). Ellen White recognized the linkage between temperance and God's endtime message: “I was also to speak on the subject of temperance as the Lord's appointed messenger” (*Temperance*, Appendix A, p. 259). She distinguished between temperance, on the one hand, as the “cause,”

and life, health, and character development, on the other hand, as the “result”—“Temperance alone is the foundation of all the graces that come from God, the foundation of all victories to be gained” (ibid., p. 201).

#### A 28th Doctrine?

Pause on the implications. Temperance, in the Adventist context, is not to be limited to counteracting tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs; rather, it is to permeate the Adventist message! Temperance “is just as much connected with the third angel’s message as the right arm is

with the body” (*Temperance*, p. 238). Should temperance then be listed as our 28th doctrine? Never! It is to permeate the 27! And “every member” is to actively promote the temperance cause. Period! (See *Temperance*, page 256.)

Surely, then, we will honor the Lord by becoming a reform-minded, temperance-witnessing, temperance-living, and temperance-victorious people. And only then will the Word be heard in all its relevant, end-time loving urgency. Far from being out of date, *temperance* is the word for tomorrow! □

## A M O R A L D I L E M M A

**T**he link between the food on the plate and the living, breathing, warm-blooded creature (in the forest or in the commercial gulag-cum-slaughterhouse) is getting thinner by the year, to the point of metaphysical disconnect. The disconnect is a form of stupidity or of moral carelessness. How can anyone object to hunting but also eat meat raised in misery for the slaughterhouse? Who has clean hands? Surely not the consumers of the 38 million cows and calves, the 92 million hogs, the 4 million sheep and 7 billion chickens killed [in 1997], to say nothing of the animals slaughtered to give us our belts, shoes, wallets, handbags, and fur coats. The saint, of course, may forsake meat and leather. But virtue always comes with its ironies. Hitler was a vegetarian.—*Time*, Nov. 30, 1998.