

Sober-Mindedness Pressed upon Youth



Matthew Henry, the commentator (1662-1714)

Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. Titus 2:6

The following article is from an earlier age, a time far removed from our “instant society” and the “whoever has the biggest toys wins” mindset of our current culture. Thus, it may seem like the uttermost of folly to many.

The English of this article has been modernized ... to a degree. Some of the old way of speaking has been left intact, with the express purpose of making the reader stretch himself a little bit and exercise the mind ... and THINK ABOUT what he/she is reading. After all, the first section speaks about the need of youth to mature their mind through THINKING about serious matters.

We suggest that the reader take the time to properly digest this article, to be mature enough to not lay it aside just because he/she may have to THINK and CONSIDER. Oh, that a generation of young men and ladies could arise to show our society a better way than the slovenly path of self-indulgence! ~

It is the great duty of all young people to be sober-minded. In this discourse I shall endeavor to show you,

- (1) what this sober-mindedness is
- (2) what considerations should engage you to be sober-minded
- (3) how to make such applications in your life

So, to begin, let us see what it is to be sober-minded. I beseech you suffer this word and receive it at your peril, for if it comes from God, it is at your utmost peril to refuse it. Give this exhortation its full scope.

- You must be considerate and thoughtful, and not rash and heedless.

To be sober-minded is to make use of our reason, in reasoning with ourselves and in communing with our own hearts. It is to employ those noble powers and capacities by which we are distinguished from and dignified above the animals. We learned to walk when we were children; when will we learn to think, to think seriously, to think to the purpose? Our heads are full of floating thoughts, foreign and impertinent. When will we be brought to close and fixed thoughts, to think with concern and application of the great things that belong to our everlasting peace and welfare? We were endued with reason and heart-communion for those great ends, that we might not receive the grace of God in vain, but being rational creatures, we might act like we should.

Some have recommended the study of mathematics to mature the minds of young people, but I would much rather it were done by a deep concern about the soul and another world. If such prevailed, it would eventually mature their thoughts to the best purpose. Because when we come to see the greatness of that God with whom we have to do, and the weight of eternity we are standing on the brink of, we will see it is time to think, and high time to look about us.

We must learn to think not only of what is smack in front of our eyes—of what merely strikes the senses and affects the imagination—but of the causes and consequences and reasons of things. We should discover truths and compare them with one another, to argue them and finally apply them to ourselves. We should beware of fastening upon thoughts that first pop into our minds, instead of fastening upon those that should come first and which deserve to be first considered.

Multitudes are undone because they are unthinking. Not considering life is the ruin of thousands, and many a precious soul has perished through mere carelessness. The Lord would have us “consider our ways,” and retire into our own souls and get to know our own heart. Assuredly, it would be the most profitable acquaintance we could fall into! While we covet to see the world, we are strangers at home. Take

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time to think! Desire to be alone now and then, and let not solitude and retirement be an uneasiness to you. You have a heart of your own you may talk to, and a God nigh with whom you may have pleasing communion.

Learn to think freely, for God invites you to do so: “Come now, and let us reason

together.” I encourage you to inquire and think impartially, as the noble Bereans did, searching the scriptures daily to see whether those things which the apostles told them were true. Pure Christianity does not fear the scrutiny of a free thought, but it despises the impotent malice of a prejudiced one.

So, beloved, learn to think for yourselves. Think of what you are, of what you are capable of, think of who made you and what you were made for. Think of why you were endowed with the powers of reason. Think of what you have been doing since you came into this world. Think of the great work you were sent into the world for; think of the vanity of childhood and youth—of how unavoidably those years are passing away—and determine whether or not it be high time for the youngest of you to begin to be religious and enter in at the strait gate.

As to your particular actions, do not jump for every adventure, like those that despise their own ways, but consider what you do before you do it that you may not have occasion to repent of it afterwards. Do nothing rashly. Always speak and act under the control of the great law of considering your ways. Ponder the path of your feet, that it may be a strait path. Some people take pride in being careless, and they glory in their shame. But you are not to be thus negligent; set your hearts to all those things that are testified, and think on them with the reason of men.

- You must be cautious and prudent, and not willful and heady.

You must not only think rationally, but after you have done so, you must act wisely. Walk circumspectly, look before you, look around you; look under your feet and pick your way, not as fools, but as wise. King David said, “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way,” and his prayer was, “Lord, when wilt thou come unto me?” Accordingly, we find

that his purpose was performed and prayer answered, as “he behaved himself wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him.” God will guide those that govern themselves; but those that love to wander, God will leave to wander endlessly.

Put away childish follies with other childish things, and do not speak and think like children all your days. Adopt principles of wisdom. Fix to yourselves rules of wisdom, and be ruled by those rules, and acted by those principles. It is the wisdom of the prudent to understand his own way, his own business, and not to censure other people’s. Such wisdom will be profitable to direct your measures and steps in all cases. Youth is apt to be bold and venturesome, and therefore resolute and dogmatic, to its great bigotry. But you are not to be so. Let the place of reason and conscience give check to the violence of appetite and passion, let them rectify the mistakes and overrule the hasty dictates of humor and fancy. Let them reduce the arbitrary and exorbitant power of those tyrants called appetite and passion!

How often did Solomon press it upon the young man under his tuition to get wisdom? Recall this: “My son, be wise; wisdom is the principle thing, therefore get wisdom, get understanding.” You that are launching out into the world must take wisdom to be your pilot, or you are in danger of splitting upon some rock.

Be hesitant of your own judgments, and jealous of yourselves. Be careful not to take all things right and entire lest your resolutions resulting from your faulty considerations be proved wrong. Do not say, “I will do so-and-so ...” or “I am resolved to do such-and-such regardless of what may be said to the contrary ...” or “I will walk in the way of my heart, and in the sight of my eyes, whatever it may cost me ...” Never have any will except that which is guided by wisdom. Be willing to be advised by your friends in every case of moment and difficulty, and depend more upon the judgment of those who have more experience in the world than you. Consult with those who are wise and good. Ask them what they would do if they were in your case, and you will find that “in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” And if such advice does not prove well, you shall then have comfort knowing that at least you acted in mature deliberation, and that you did it for the best.

What brighter character can be given of a young man, than to have someone say “He is wise”?

What brighter character can be given of a young man, than to have someone say, “He is wise”? Or what blacker than to have someone say, “He is willful”? But would you be wise—not only regarded as wise—but be really wise?

Study the scriptures. By them you will get more understanding than the ancients, more than all your teachers. Make your observations upon the fortune and misfortune of others, taking a pattern by those who do well and a warning by those who do ill. Beloved, look upon both examples, and receive instruction. But be especially earnest with God in prayer for wisdom, as Solomon was, for such prayer is both pleasing and prevailing in heaven. "If any man" (if any young man) "lack wisdom" (if he understands that he lacks wisdom, his way to it is plain) "let him ask of God" (and he is encouraged to do it) "for the Lord giveth wisdom." The Lord delights to give wisdom, He gives it liberally, and He has a particular eye to young people in the dispensing of this gift. His word was written "to give to the young man knowledge and discretion."

For those who are willing, but do not care to be scolded, we are told that God gives and upbraids not. But if this were not enough to encourage the beggar at Wisdom's gate, there is an express promise to everyone who seeks in the right way: he shall not seek in vain. This is not a promise with a "perhaps," but one with the greatest assurance: "It shall be given him." Ja. 1:5 To all true believers, Christ is, and shall be, made wisdom.

- You must be humble and modest, and not proud and conceited.

Sober-mindedness is the same as lowly-mindedness. It is that same poverty of spirit on which Christ pronounced His first blessing (Mt. 5:3), and what is recommended to the younger when Peter writes to be "clothed with humility." 1 Pe. 5:5

I have seen more young people ruined by pride than perhaps by any other lust. Therefore let me press this upon you with all earnestness; it is a caution introduced with more than ordinary solemnity. It is this: "Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but think soberly." Let him think unto sobriety, let him think himself into a sober mind, and always keep in that good mind.

Keep low thoughts of yourselves, of your endeavors both outward and inward, of your attainments and improvements, of all your performances, and all the things you call merits and excellencies. Boast not of a false gift, of what you have not, nor be puffed up with what you have. Whatever you may have in you that is commendable, treat it as people would their own faults and diminish it, and look much at that in others which is more commendable.

If you are handsome, do not glory in it, nor in your beauty, nor in your ingenious wit. Does your face shine in any respect? Be as Moses was; as soon as he perceived it, he placed a veil over it, not wishing the people to see. Delight more to say and do what is praiseworthy than to be

praised for it. Remember: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" And what have you received that you have not abused? Why then should you boast?

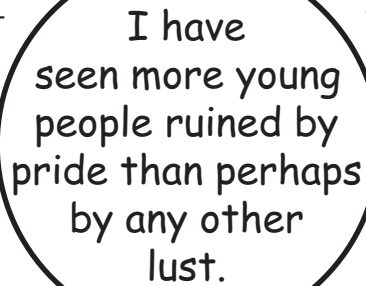
Keep up a quick and constant sense of your manifold defects and infirmities, of how much there is in you, and how much is said and done by you every day. Keep in mind that which you have reason to be ashamed of and humbled for, think of how many things you fall short in, and in how many more you come short of the rule. You will soon find no reason to be proud of what you know when you begin to see how much you are ignorant of, and you will see how "ungood" you are when you see how much you do amiss. Dwell much upon humbling considerations, and upon those that tend to take down your high opinion of yourselves. Keep up a humble sense of your necessary and constant dependence upon Christ and His grace, without which you are nothing, and will soon be worse than nothing.

Think not yourselves too wise, too good, or too old to be reprov'd and taught to do better. When you are double and triple the age you are now, even then think not yourselves too old to learn, and increase in learning. "If any man thinks that he knows anything" (if he thinks he knows "everything," so that he needs no more instruction) "he

knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." 1 Co. 8:2 If you deem yourselves wise, become fools that you may be wise. Be sensible of your own folly that you may become aware of how to attain to wisdom, and prepared to receive the grace of wisdom.

Have no confidence in your own judgment, nor be opinionative, nor look upon those with contempt that do not think as you do. Be not quick to say, "I hold to so-and-so ..." It is like a serious preacher once told a novice who was laying down the law with great assurance: "It best becomes you to hold your peace." Take heed of thinking yourselves above your business. You that are apprentices, think not yourselves above your service. Humility will make the yoke you are under easy to carry. Think it no disparagement to confine yourselves to your business. Be ashamed of nothing but sin.

It will be yet much worse if you think yourselves above your religion, above the restraints of it, as if it were a thing below you to be afraid of sin, or to make it a thing of conscience concerning your words and actions. But there cannot be a greater disgrace to you than loose walking. Nor think yourselves above the exercises of your religion, as if it were a thing below you to pray, hear the word of God, and join in acts of devotion, for the greatest honor you can do yourselves is to honor God.



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Beloved, let this branch of sober-mindedness appear in your looks and behavior. Let the show of your countenances be a witness for you, that you are not confident and conceited. Always keep up a due reserve of yourselves, and a due reverence to everyone about you—and especially to those above you. Be not pert in the way you carry yourselves nor fantastical in your dress. Humility and modesty reigning in the heart are the best ornaments, in the sight of God, and in all wise men. These are of great price, and you will find that “better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud,” for when “men’s pride shall bring them low, honor shall uphold the humble in spirit.” Yes, they shall be upheld, borne up, and borne out in that honor.

- You must be temperate and self-denying, and not indulgent of your appetites.

Let me now warn young men to dread the sin of drunkenness,¹ to keep a distance from it, to avoid all appearances of it, and all approaches to it. It has slain its thousands—nay, its tens of thousands of young people. It has ruined their health, brought diseases upon them, and cut them off in the flower of their days. How many fall as unpitied sacrifices to this base lust!

Take heed of the beginnings of this sin, for the way of it is downhill, and many, under the pretense of innocent entertainment and passing the evening in pleasant conversation, are drawn to drink in excess and make beasts of themselves. You should tremble to think how fatal the consequences are, how unfit it renders you for the service of God, yes, and for your own job in the morning. How many are thus besotted and sunk into a drowsiness that clothes a man with rags, and yet that is not the worst. It also extinguishes convictions and the spark of devotion and provokes the Spirit of grace to withdraw. It will be the sinner’s eternal ruin if it be not repented of and forsaken in time. The word of God has said it: “Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God” and “Look not upon the wine when it is red, when it gives its color in the cup,” (when it is charming and tempting; do not be overcome with its allurements, for it shall) “... bite like a serpent and sting like an adder.”

If you saw the devil putting the cup of drunkenness in your hand, I dare say you would not take it. You may be sure this temptation comes from him, and therefore you ought to dread it as much as if you saw him offering it to you. If you saw poison enter the glass, you would not drink it. If strong drink be provoking to God and to the ruining of your souls,

¹ The author is undoubtedly speaking about drunkenness caused by the ingestion of alcohol. However, the same applies with being drunk on pleasures, addiction to adrenalin rushes, and such like. If the shoe fits, wear it.

such then is much worse than poison! It is even worse than death: there is hell in the cup! I am sorry we cannot urge this more strongly against you, so much as gladly we would the scandal of it, for drinking has grown so fashionable. But whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, we will insist upon the sin of it, and its prejudice to the soul both here and forever, and beg of you to consider these things and frighten yourselves from it. We will insist likewise upon the real disgrace drunkenness is to a reasonable creature, to one who is hereby spoiled of his crown, and leveled with the brutes. We would convince you to shame yourselves out of it before God and your own conscience.

Drunkenness is a sin that is in a special manner shameful and hurtful to those who profess religion. You that have been well-educated and brought up in sober families have had examples of sobriety set before you.

You have known the honors and pleasures of sober conversation. What a reproach it will be to you if you take up the regimen of a drunkard! What a degeneracy! What a fall from your first love! Tell me, where will it all stop? Perhaps you have already given your name to the Lord Jesus, and dare to sit at His table, partaking of His cup and the cup of devils. Let Christians that are made kings and priests by God take a lesson which Solomon’s mother taught him: “It is not for kings, oh Lemuel, it is not for kings” (so it is not for Christians) “to drink wine lest they drink and forget the law” (forget the gospel). And yet this is not all I have to warn you of.

Young people should not be solicitous to have all the delights of their senses wound up to the height of pleasure-ability. Be not “desirous of dainties, for they are deceitful meat.” Pr. 23:3 It is true that although the use of them is perhaps lawful, the love of them is dangerous. The indulging of the appetites of the body is oft injurious to the soul. Learn instead to relish the delights that are rational and spiritual, causing your mouths to be out of taste to that which is brutal and belong only to animal life. Be afraid lest by indulging the body and the lusts of it you come by degrees to the black character of those that were “lovers of pleasure more than the lovers of God.” 2 Ti. 3:4

The body is made to be a servant to the soul, and it must be treated accordingly. We must give to it as we would give to a servant: that which is just and equal. Let the body have what is fitting, but let it not be suffered to domineer, for nothing is so insufferable as “a servant when he reigneth.” Pr. 30:22 Be also careful not to pamper it, for “he that delicately brings up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son at the length.” Pr. 29:21

Be dead therefore to the delights of the five senses, and kill the love of ease and pleasure. Learn to endure hardness,

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learn to deny yourselves, and you will then make it easy to bear the common calamities of human life, as well as sufferings for the sake of righteousness. Those that would approve themselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ must endure hardness, and they must accustom themselves to it. 2 Ti. 2:3

- You must be mild and gentle, and not indulgent of your passions.

This signifies moderation, a soundness of mind that is opposed to frenzy and violence. We have need of sobriety to restrain and repress not only our inordinate appetites towards those things that are pleasing to our senses, but also to our irregular resentment of those things that are displeasing; for mankind got a vexatious knowledge of good and evil by eating of the forbidden tree.

Young people are especially apt to be hot and furious, to resent rebukes and correction, and to study revenge like Simeon and Levi, whose fierce anger was cursed along with their cruel wrath. Their passions were ungoverned because their pride was not killed.

Young people are fond of liberty and therefore cannot bear having someone tell them what to do. They are wedded to their own opinions and therefore cannot bear contradiction, but are quickly all in a flame if crossed. They reckon it to their honor (when really it is a shame) to let their passions run free and not care what indecencies they are being transporting into by them, nor do they consider how mischievous the consequences may be.

Learn, therefore, to bridle your anger, and to guard against the sparks of provocation, that they may not fall into the tinder. If the fire be already kindled, put it out presently by commanding peace in your own souls and setting a watch before the door of your lips. And when at any time you are affronted, or think yourselves so, don't strive to give a smart answer (which will only stir up more anger), but aim for wisdom and grace of a soft answer (which will turn away wrath—Pr. 15:1).

You are setting out in the world now, and would have your passage through it be comfortable. Nothing will contribute more to that than a quiet spirit. "The meek shall inherit the earth" was God's promise, by David first (Ps. 37:11), and then after by the Son of David (Mt. 5:5). By the good government of your passions, you will make yourselves easy, and easy to those about you. A great deal of mischief both to others and to yourselves will be prevented.

If you let your passions control you now while you are young, they will be in danger of growing more and more headstrong as you get older, and of making you perpetually

uneasy. But if you get dominion over them now, you will easily keep this dominion and so keep the peace in your hearts and houses, and through the grace of God it will not be in the power of even sickness or old age to make you peevish, sour your attitude, or embitter your spirit. Put on therefore among the ornaments of your youth "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness and long-suffering."

- You must be chaste and reserved, and not wanton and impure.

The lusts of the flesh which are manifest—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness (Ga. 5:19)—are particularly called youthful lusts. And against those, in Christ's name, I am here to warn all you that are young.

For God's sake, and for your own precious soul's sake, flee these youthful lusts! Dread them as you would a devouring fire, or a destroying plague, and keep at a distance from them. Abstain from all appearances of these sins, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh, even the attire of a harlot. Covet not to know these depths of Satan, but take pride in being ignorant of the way of the adulterous woman. See all temptations to uncleanness as coming from the unclean spirit, that roaring lion who goes about continually, thus seeking to devour young people. O that you would conceive a detestation and abhorrence

of this sin and put on a firm and steady resolution in the strength of the grace of Jesus Christ to never defile yourselves with it! Remember what the apostle prescribes, as that which ought to be the constant care of the unmarried, to be holy in both body and spirit, and so to please the Lord. 1 Co. 7:34

Take heed of the beginnings of this sin, lest Satan get an advantage against you and the little thief who insensibly breaks in through the window, goes on to open the door for the strong man to enter. How earnestly doth Solomon warn the young man to take heed of the baits, lest he be taken in the snares of the evil woman! "Remove thy way far from her," saith he, because he that would be kept from harm, must keep out of harm's way. "Come not nigh to the door of her house," but go on the other side of the street, as though it were a house infected; lest you mourn at last when your flesh and body are consumed. Pray earnestly to God for the grace to keep you from this sin, that the grace may be sufficient for you, that the temptation never be so sudden, that it may find you awake and aware of it, and that you may not be surprised by it. Pray that it never be so strong as to find



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you unarmed against it; but put on the whole armor of God that you may not be overpowered and overcome by it.

Get your hearts purified by the Word of God, and sanctified by divine love, for how else shall young people cleanse their way, but by taking heed thereto, according to the Word? Keep up the authority of conscience, and keep it always tender and void of offence. Make a covenant with your eyes, that they may not be the inlets of any impure thoughts, or the outlets of any impure desires. Pray David's prayer: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity," that you may never look and lust. Modesty is the hedge of chastity, and the ornament of your age, so be sure to let your dress and conduct exemplify modesty, and as such to speak a chaste communication coupled with fear. Make it so that you know how to be pleasant and cheerful without transgressing even the strictest rules of modesty—and that you are ignorant of being anything but modest.

I would especially charge you that are young to take heed that no corrupt, filthy communication proceed out of your mouth. Never dare speak nor delight to hear anything that is immodest. "Fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you;" indeed, foolish talking and jesting "which is not convenient" is very unbecoming for professors of such a pure and undefiled religion as Christianity. It is "evil communication" which corrupts good manners, and for which our Savior saith we must give account on the great day. Think, therefore, what a great dishonor filthy talk is to God, what a reproach it is to yourselves, and what mischief it does to those you converse with. Think of how great a matter a spark of this fire from hell may kindle, and how much the sin and ruin of souls you may have to answer for. God turns those to a pure language whom he brings to call upon his name. Zp. 3:9

- You must be steady and composed, and not giddy and unsettled.

In contrast to a roving and wandering heart, and a heart divided, this we commonly take to be signified by a mind that acts and moves steadily and is one with itself. Be therefore sober-minded, and let your hearts be fixed.

Establish them, and be not like Reuben who was "unstable as water," for those who are like that will never excel. Fix now serious godliness in your youth; fix heaven as your end and holiness as your way. Halt no longer, hover no longer between the two, but be at a point. You have been bidden to chose whom you will serve; stand no longer de-

liberating, but bring this matter finally at length to the issue you will abide by ... and abide by it. Fix yourself to whatever you were designed for in this world. Whatever it is that you are employed in, let your application to it be close and constant, and do not divert from it upon every slight and trivial pretense.

Learn to fix your thoughts, and be not wandering; let them not run from one thing to another, as a bird in flight—for thus thy thoughts run at length with fool's eyes to the ends of the earth. What thy hand finds to do and heart finds to think—which is to God's purpose—do it and think it with

all your might and pursue it until you finish it. Learn to fix your goals and act with a single eye, for the double-minded man—who is far from being sober-minded—cannot but be unstable in all his ways, and turns himself as the wind, and "he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea." Ja. 1:6,8

Act consistently with yourselves; understand your own ways. Do not have your ear open to every whisper and suggestion that would turn you from it. Be no more children tossed to and fro with every bait (Ep. 4:14), but in understanding be ye men, be ye fixed, let your foot stand in an even place, and let your hearts be established. Be not moved—and be not removed.

- You must be content and easy, and not ambitious and aspiring.

A sober mind is that which accommodates itself to every estate of life, and every event of Providence, so that whatever changes happen, it preserves the possession and enjoyment of itself.

You who are young must learn to reconcile yourselves to your current situation, and make the best of it, because it is the will of God it should be as it is, and what pleases Him should please us. This is because He knows better than we do what is fit to be done, and fit for us to have. Let this challenge all troubling and discontented thoughts. Should it be according to your mind? Shall you who are but of yesterday control Him, argue with Him, or prescribe to Him, whose counsels were of old from everlasting? It is folly to direct the divine disposals, but wisdom to delight in them.

He who determines the times before appointed, and the bounds of men's habitation, ordered what our rank and station should be in the world, what parents we should be born of, what lot we should be born to, and what our make and capacity of mind and body should be. In these respects there is a great variety ordained by Providence between some



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people and others, who yet are made of one blood. Some are born to wealth and honor, others to poverty and obscurity. Some seem made and marked by nature (that is, the God of nature) to be great and esteemed, while others seem “doomed” to be all their days little and low. You see many above you, who make a name for themselves in the world, and are likely to do so yet more, while you are of little importance. Yet, do not envy them, nor fret at the place God’s Providence has put you in, but make yourselves easy in it, and make the best of it, as those who are satisfied.

Possess your minds while you are young with a reverence for the divine Providence, its sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness; and bring your minds unto a cheerful submission of yourselves to all its determinations. Here I am; let the Lord do with me, and all my affairs, as seems good in His sight. This would have a mighty influence upon the conduct of your affairs, and the evenness of your spirits, all your days. Whatever earthly things are taken from you, or you lose the enjoyment of, resolve to be content. Don’t accept it because you cannot help it, “This is an evil, and I must bear it,” that is but a poor reason. But accept it because it is the will of God, whose will is His wisdom, “This is an evil, but it is designed for my good, and I will bear it.”

Lay your expectations low from this world, and don’t promise yourselves great wealth or esteem in it. It is God’s command. Ro. 12:16 Do not covet the riches of this world, do not set your eyes and hearts upon them, as if they were the best things, and as if they would make you happy, and you could not be happy without them. But condescend to people of low estate, and take as much pleasure in conversation with them as if they were company for princes and your peers. Or, as the margin reads it, “Be content with modest things,” with a modest habitation, modest diet, modest clothes, modest employments, if such be your lot. And instead of blaming it on Him, bless God for it that it is not worse, and believe that it is best for you.

Aim at advancing yourselves, not that you may live in more pomp and ease, but that you may be in so much the better capacity to do good. We commonly say of you who are young that “now is your time to make your fortune”; it is a heathenish expression, for it is not blind fortune, but an all-seeing Providence that we are governed by. But that is not all; it is not in your power to make your own lot; every man’s judgment proceeds from the Lord.

Let young people be modest and moderate, and sober-minded in their desires and expectations of temporal good

things, as becomes those who see through them, and look above and beyond them, to the things not seen, that are eternal.

- You must be grave and serious, and not frothy and vain.

This meaning we commonly give to the word here used. Him that is serious we call a sober man. And I put this last in the list of the ingredients of sober-mindedness, because it will have a very great influence upon all the rest. We should gain our point entirely with young people, if we could but prevail with them to be serious. It is serious piety we would bring them to, and to live in good earnest.

It’s not that we would oblige young people never to be merry, nor do we have any ill-natured design upon them to make them melancholy. No, religion allows them to be cheerful; it is your time, make your best of

it. Evil days will come, of which you will say you have no pleasure in them, when the cares and sorrows of this world increase upon you. We would not have you to anticipate those evil days.

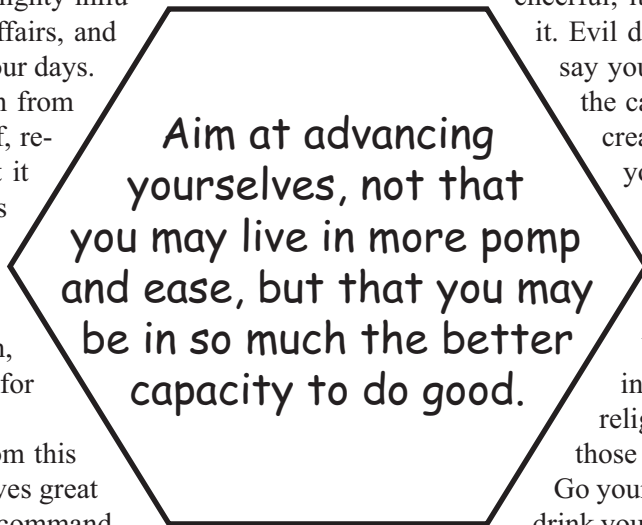
It is mentioned as an instance of the promised prosperity and flourishing state of Jerusalem, that the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Zc. 8:5 No, religion prescribes cheerfulness to all those who are sincere and hearty in it.

Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God now accepts your works. Ec. 9:7 God expects

to be served by us with joyfulness and gladness of heart, in the abundance of all things. De. 28:47

And it is certain that none have such good reason to be cheerful as godly people have, none can be so upon better grounds, or with a better grace; so justly or so safely. I have often said, and I must take all occasions to repeat it, that a holy, heavenly life spent in the service of God and in communion with Him is without doubt the most pleasant, comfortable life that anyone can live in this world.

But that which I would caution you against under this heading is vain and carnal mirth, that mirth, that laughter of the fool, of which Solomon says, “It is mad,” and “What doeth it?” Innocent mirth is of good use in its time and place, it will revive the spirit and fit you for business. A merry heart does good like a medicine. But ... it must be used like a medicine, must be taken physically, only when there is occasion for it, and not constantly, like our daily bread. And like medicine, it must be taken by rule; as not too often, so not too much at a time, like opiates, which are taken by drops, and with great caution. When you make use of these



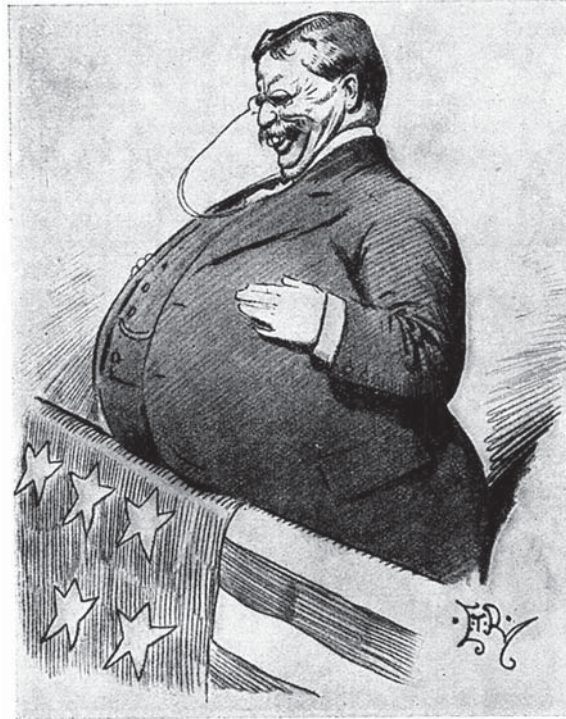
medicines, it must be done according to prescription, and you must take great care of yourselves lest that turn to your hurt and become a snare and a trap, which was intended for your health and welfare.

Allow yourselves in mirth as far as will consist with sober-mindedness, and no further. Be merry and wise; never let your mirth transgress the laws of piety, charity, or modesty, nor encroach upon your time for devotion and the service of God. Wise men will always reckon him over fond of his mirth, who will rather lose his friend than his jest. This is worse yet with he who will rather lose his God and a good conscience. Never make sport with the Scripture and sacred things, but let that which is serious always be spoken of with seriousness; for it is dangerous playing with sharp tools.

Take heed lest your mirth exceed due bounds, and transport you into any indecencies; that you give not yourselves too great a liberty, and then think to excuse it by saying, "Am not I in sport?" Pr. 26:19 Set a double guard at such a time before the door of your lips, lest you offend with your tongues; and especially keep your hearts with all diligence. Let the inward thought still be serious; and in the midst of your greatest mirth, retain a disposition habitually serious, and a reigning affection to spiritual and divine things. Such will make you indifferent to all vain mirth and pleasure, and set you above it, and enable you to look upon that with a holy contempt, which many spend so much of their time in with so great a complacency. A serious Christian, though, to relax himself and entertain his friends, he may allow himself a little mirth and recreation, yet he will make it to appear that he is not in his element, that he knows better pleasures, and that he has given spiritual things the preference. A believing foretaste of the milk and honey of Canaan is enough to put the mouth quite out of taste with the garlic and onions of Egypt!

But while I am pressing you who are young to be always serious, habitually so, always well affected to serious work, what shall we think of those who are never serious? Who are always merry, always jesting, always bantering, so that you never know when they speak in earnest? Who are always in pursuit of some sensual pleasure or other, and never

know what it is to be one quarter of an hour serious, from the beginning of the year to the end of it? Certainly they forget that for all these things God shall bring them into judgment, and they know not how soon. O that this laughter might be turned into the mourning of true penitents, and this joy into the heaviness of sincere converts, that it may not be turned, as otherwise it certainly will be, into the weeping and wailing of condemned sinners! The same Jesus who said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," has said also, "Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." Lu. 6:25



If you take the world for your guide, you will be bid to "laugh and be fat."

Shall I now prevail with you who are young, to value wisdom above wit, and that which helps to make you serious above that which helps to make you merry; and to take as much pleasure in sobriety as others do in vanity? It will be the honor of your youth, will arm you against the temptations you are surrounded with, and will not only mark you for something considerable in this world, but for something infinitely more so in the other world. And, if you understand yourselves aright, I dare say, one hour spent in the employments and enjoyments of a sober, serious mind will afford you more true comfort in the reflection, than many spent in mirth and gaiety, because it will certainly pass so much better in the account another day.

If you take the world for your guide, you will be bid to "laugh and be fat;" will be told that "an ounce of mirth is worth a pound of sorrow." But if you will attend to the dictates of the word of God (and it is fit that the word that must

judge us hereafter should rule us now), that will tell you that sorrow is better than laughter; and that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. For by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better; it is made serious.

And thus you see what it is to be sober-minded, and how much of your duty it takes in. But are you content that it should take in all this? Can you say, that though in many things you come short, yet you esteem all these precepts, and all the things contained in them, to be right, and, therefore, hate every false way? You will then be very willing to have this sober-mindedness further pressed upon you. ~